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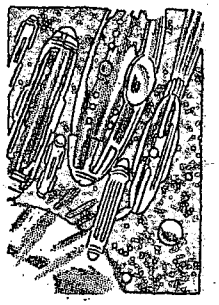
The Magazine of Prophetic Fiction

Vol. XXVII, No. 1
Spring, 1945

Next Issue



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MURRAY LEINSTER

THE WORLD THINKER
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A Humorous Story
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DEVILS FROM DARKONIA

By JERRY SHELTON

When strange demons drive him haywire, Professor Bradley learns that if you advertise for the Devil, that worthy—or a reasonable facsimile of same—is sure to appear! 11

Two Complete Novelets

VENUS SKY-TRAP ..... Ross Rocklynne 48
With a girl's life at stake, Reg Mason and Pirate Aarn take a chance to balk a villain!

BABY FACE ..... Henry Kuttner 88
When a tough sergeant reverts to infancy he just won't be weaned from fighting mankind's foes!

Thrilling Short Stories

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ON THE COVER: Painting by Earle Bergey depicts a scene in Jerry Shelton's fantastic novel, DEVILS FROM DARKONIA.

Published quarterly by STANDARD MAGAZINES, INC., 10 East 40th Street, New York 16, N. Y. N. L. Pines, President.

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Names of all characters used in stories and semi-fiction articles are fictitious. If the name of any living person or existing institution is used, it is a coincidence.

May, 1945, issue

PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

Read our Companion Science Fiction Magazine—STARTLING STORIES

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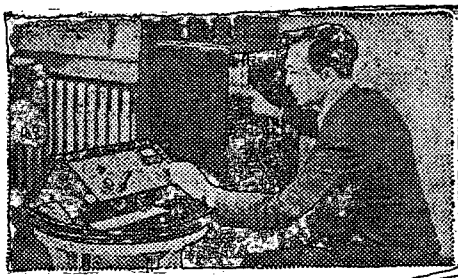
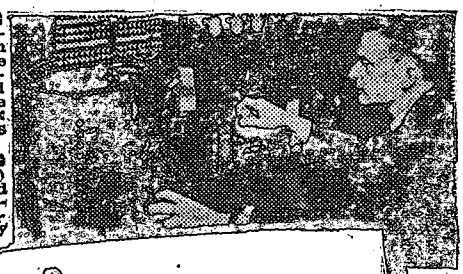


RADIO SERVICING (left). N.R.I. Graduates operate their own successful full time Radio repair businesses. Others hold regular jobs, make $5, $10 a week EXTRA fixing Radios in spare time.

BROADCASTING STATIONS (right) employ N.R.I. trained men as Operators, Installation and Maintenance Men and pay well.



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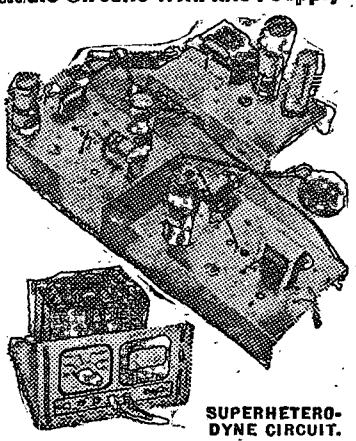

SUPERHETERODYNE CIRCUIT. Preselector, oscillator—mixer-first detector, i.f. stage, diode-detector — a.v.c stage, audio stage. Brings in local and distant stations.

MEASURING INSTRUMENT. Vacuum tube multimeter, measures A.C., D.C., R.F. volts, D.C. currents, resistance, receiver output.

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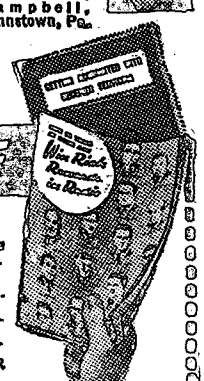

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A Department Conducted by SERGEANT SATURN

BRILLIG is no word for the slithiness of the Arcturean lapis lazuli toves in which ye Sarge finds himself at present. Typewriter-calloused digits atremble, filmed-over eyes aflame with bursting blood vessels, bicuspids coated each with its individual little sweater of long-staple Neptunian yak fur, trebly-crusted tongue adangle—indeed, this old space dog is in sorry shape.

Mere earthlings may rend the air with lachrymations over the shortage of beefsteak or the lack of cigarettes—they are, in short, a puny species with capacity for only the least depravities, and their combined ululations pale before ye Sarge's oral detonations.

THE XENO TUBS ARE EMPTY!

The Xeno tubs are empty!

Snaggletooth fell into the still, clumsy space-oaf that he is, while testing the stern rocket tubes, and before ye Sarge could order those twin hebetudinous orphans of the outer ether, Wart-ears and Frog-eyes, to let him bubble through the coils, the cretins drained the vat through the emergency bung-hole.

When last seen through the visascope, the raw nectar had coagulated into a whirling nebula, was exploding with dynamic force as it formed the nucleus of a new galaxy. Oh, precious liquid fire of heaven, oh woe, oh anguish!

Snaggle-tooth, you sub-lunar brachicephalic, how long? Ten Neptunian minutes longer? You'll have it ready in nine, or I'll drop you in the still myself, and drink your distilled essence to eternity in the snows of Polaris.

Ye Sarge is in the mood for feuding.

Whiling away the endless seconds before the new batch of divine elixir is ready—Stir your stumps there, Frog-eyes, it's partly your fault too!—this aching astrogator decided to study the work of the late H. P. Lovecraft, and at present he is in no mood to respect the departed merely because he went.

To see Lovecraft's work mentioned in the same paragraph with the masterpieces of H. G. Wells, Guy de Maupassant, Alexander Laing or even the slightly decrepit Edgar Allan Poe is enough to quadruple the old Sarge's urgent need for a Xeno mouthwash. Yet STF fans do this again and again with more than orbital repetition.

Apparently the late "master" measured his impact by the tenth power of the adjectives included in the story—and he poured them in by the bushel basket. His overwriting was on a par with that of certain ambitious members of the LASFS. On his bones, a Mercurian malediction!

Take time out from distilling, Wart-ears, and treble the thickness of the cosmic screens. Ye Sarge feels a galactic storm abrewing!

LOOKING FORWARD

WELL, the future looks a bit lighter with renewed Xeno supplies and Murray Leinster's magnificent novel of the mysteries of space, THINGS PASS BY. In this case the "things" are an immense intergalactic migration of tremendous space-ships, powered and peopled by elements utterly unknown to humanity which threaten to wipe out Earth and the other Solar planets even as you or I might destroy an anthill without knowing it while walking a country lane.

But for Dirk Braddick, a brilliant young scientist who foresaw the "things" and took steps against them, our universe would have been destroyed—and the steps he had to take were so radical that the powers which ruled earth deemed him a dangerous anarchist and sought to destroy their one hope of salvation. It is one of Leinster's very best—which is enough as far as this old space dog is concerned.

Following right in the wake of the "things" in our next issue comes a stirring, startling fantasy by a new and brilliant STF writer, Jack Vance of Berkeley, California, and the Merchant Marine—a novelet entitled THE WORLD THINKER, in which mere man must deal with a cosmic being which creates, mutates and liquidates the worlds it can create by the power of its intellect.

THE WORLD THINKER is a brilliant inaugural by a young author who, the Sarge feels certain, is destined to be one of the finest writers of fantasy of the decade. You will read more about its author in THE STORY BEHIND THE

(Continued on page 101)

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NOTICE

Please don't confuse the U. S. School of Music method with any system of teaching music "by ear" or by trick charts. Our method teaches you to play by actual notes — not by any trick or number system.

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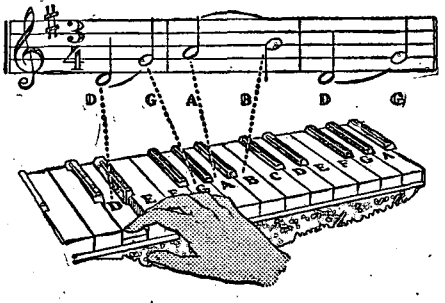

From the above diagram you can see for yourself how easy it is to learn by this Print and Picture method. You simply look at the music and diagram and see which notes to strike. In a few minutes you will find yourself playing the famous "Merry Widow Waltz."

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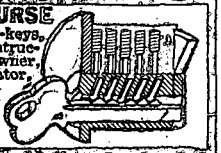

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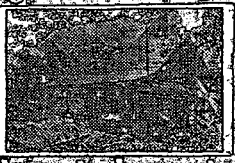

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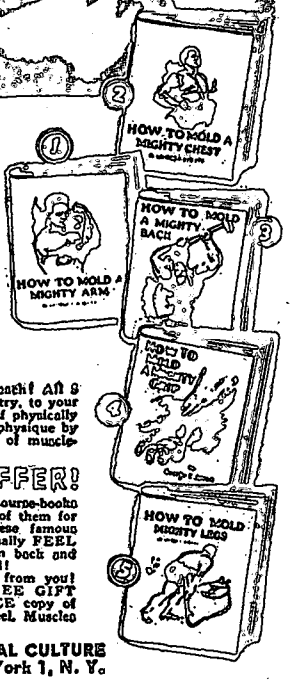

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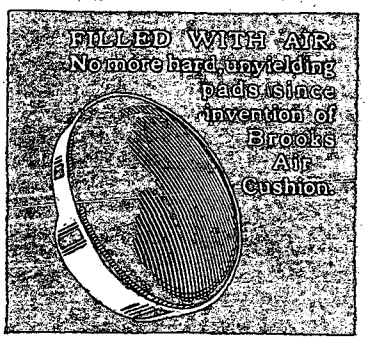

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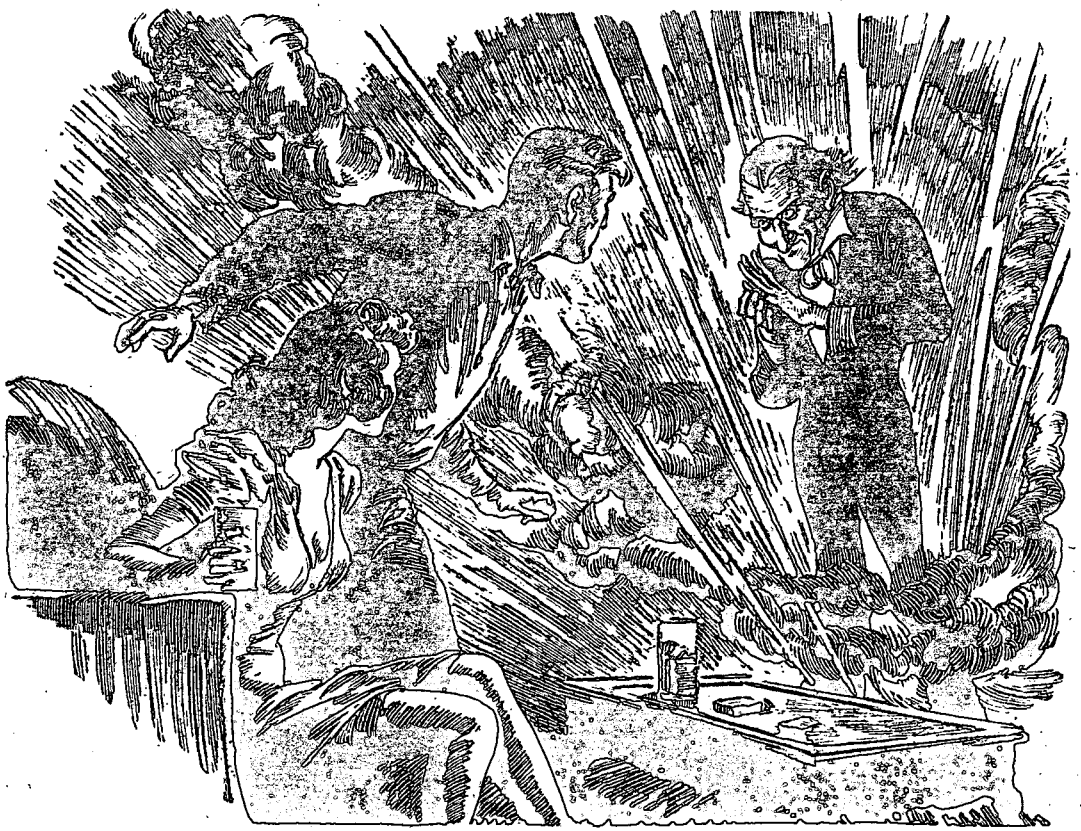

As Bradley stared the Darkonian adjusted his ring

DEVILS FROM DARKONIA

By JERRY SHELTON

When strange demons drive him haywire, Professor Bradley learns that if you advertise for the Devil that worthy—or a reasonable facsimile of same—is sure to appear!

CHAPTER I

Agent for a Soul

WITH a gesture of disdain, the little fat man rejected the excuse.

"Whether you were drunk or sober when you inserted this classified advertisement has no bearing on the matter." As he spoke he pointed an emphatic finger at the folded newspaper Professor Huxley J. Bradley was holding at arm's length and then sat down, Buddha-like on the foot of the low studio bed. "We take it for granted our prospective clients will keep good faith. You did insert the ad, you know."

Professor Huxley J. Bradley focused bleary eyes on the small print and read:

WANTED

Business association with the devil or kindred demons. Interested party willing to trade one slightly used soul for favor granted. References required.—Hux Bradley, 814 Sunnyside.

A COMPLETE FANTASTIC NOVEL

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"Now, young man, as to this matter of references," the fat man continued pompously, "I'm sure—"

"Get out of here!" exploded Professor Bradley and snapped his eyes shut. He pulled the bed covers up under his angular chin. His stomach tickled, and it felt queer. Full of duck feathers. Good heavens, what had happened to him since yesterday afternoon? His blurred thoughts were spinning like a drunken gyroscope, all lopsided. The bitter memory of the draft board rejecting his application was definite enough. But what about that sympathetic bartender? Hadn't he realized he was concocting those things for an amateur? Ugh!

Bradley wedged open one eye.

The little fat man was still there. Baldheaded, he was. Gold snakes twisted their tiny bodies into a watch chain that drooped like a yellow suspension bridge across his bulging middle.

A swift breeze stirred the feathers in Bradley's stomach. He swallowed.

"How did you get in here?" he managed to ask. "The door's locked."

The fat man shrugged. "A mere detail. Allow me to introduce myself—Horace Twembly." He removed some indexed cards from an inner pocket and went on. "When We saw your ad—We looked up your record and were rather surprised. Don't often get professors for clients. Let's see—hm-m-m." As he sorted through the cards, a curiously shaped ring on his middle finger glittered strangely.

HIS flabby lips made themselves into an orifice like the mouth of a goldfish. "You're Professor Huxley J. Bradley, teaching musical theory and musical history at the University. Author of the book 'Origin Of Jazz Music'. You spend much of your time giving free music lessons to students who can't afford to pay for them. Hm-mm-m." His soft fingers extricated a thin watch. "I'm authorized to grant you a favor—for a price, of course. It's getting late and I haven't all day to waste, you know. It's almost four in the afternoon."

"Four?" Bradley jack-knifed his lanky figure out of bed and tried to jerk the wrinkled nightshirt down over his bony knees. "What day is it? My classes—" He reeled and flopped down weakly on the bed. "My head—" His tongue slithered over his fur-coated teeth. Great Scott, what a flavor! What in the name of Bacchus had he done in that bar—swept the place out with his tongue?

"Today's Sunday—no classes today," Twembly said smoothly and glanced around the room. He gestured in an odd way at a half empty whisky bottle on the floor near some rumpled clothing, and the deep blue ring seemed to glow with an inner fire.

"You need a drink," he continued as the bottle lifted, and, bobbing gently, floated into Twembly's outstretched hand just as an empty water glass swooped unerringly out from the bathroom.

Desperate, Professor Bradley clapped his eyes shut again. Good heavens, could this be what his students so lightly referred to as a hangover? Or was it, hungover? If the faculty or Dean Fritterton heard of such doings his position would be impossible. He must pull himself together. Bradley heard the wet gurgle of a liquid being poured and felt a large glass placed in his lax fingers. Cautiously, he opened his eyes.

The fat man was staring at him. The pupils of his eyes were enormous. Little flecks of yellow swirled in bewildering patterns in the depths of the dark green iris.

"Drink it," the visitor commanded. "You'll feel better."

Wrinkles ploughed across Bradley's forehead. "More whisky?"

"Of course," said Twembly. His strange eyes flickered. "The hair of the dog, you know."

Bradley shifted the glass. The glass was large, and half full. Yesterday had been the first time Bradley had partaken of alcohol. But—perhaps this was the correct procedure.

He drained the glass. Bradley blinked once before the exploding fire in the whisky blasted his stomach-feathers into activity like a whirling, burning snowstorm.

"Such ideas," he wheezed as his lungs tried to resume their air-conditioning. "Who the devil are you?"

Twembly frowned. "Please. I wish you would be more careful of your language. I'm not really the Devil as your ad requested. But I represent a firm that can give practically the same service." He started to pour himself a drink. "We can offer a more scientific service than any old superstitious agency ever dreamed of."

A sudden memory played peek-a-boo around the corner of Bradley's consciousness—something about a Martini-inspired idea of phoning the classified ad department of a certain newspaper.

"Representative?" Professor Bradley sprang to his feet, jarring the whisky bottle and glass from Twembly's hand. "What do you mean?"

He choked and sat down abruptly as he saw the falling objects halt in mid-air, and then bob serenely over to the desk as the scattered amber droplets of whisky coalesced to float upward as a single globe toward Twembly.

"Shouldn't waste whisky like that, young man." Twembly's fat face was serious.

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A crystal bubble of air protected Bradley and Judy

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"Whisky's a decided asset in Our business and should be conserved."

As the rising globe of whisky halted, he leaned forward and opened his mouth. There was a wet sucking noise and the drink was gone. He wiped his mouth on a pocket handkerchief.

"Not bad. Not bad at all. Now as to business."

Professor Bradley passed a shaking hand over his eyes. "Do that again," he said hoarsely.

"What—the drink?" Horace Twembly's pink cheeks darkened and his chins wobbled. "Young man, I'll have you know that I don't have all day to stand around doing tricks to amuse you. Yesterday, you inserted an ad. You should have the courtesy to listen to Our proposition."

BRADLEY hiccoughed. Somehow, he was feeling better. He rubbed his stomach. He felt warm—and expansive. He straightened.

"I think I'll have some more of the hair of the dog you mentioned." With a slight stagger he walked over to the desk and splashed himself a drink.

The little flecks of yellow in Twembly's eyes swirled. "That nightshirt is a trifle too short for you, isn't it?"

"I'm too long for the nightshirt," corrected Bradley somberly and strangled down his drink. "That's why the Army wouldn't take me—said I was underweight. Not enough protoplasm for my height." He flung his arms in a wide gesture. "So I became inebriated yesterday. First time, too."

"Is that why you put the ad in the paper?"

Bradley picked up a piece of music manuscript from the desk and fanned himself. He was warm.

"What ad?" he replied hazily.

Twembly sighed. "Yesterday you inserted an ad asking for a favor. I can grant you any favor you wish. I represent the firm of Life Psyche, Incorporated." He extracted a card and offered it to Bradley. "Our business front and laboratories for this Quadrant of Space is situated downtown under the name of Tramble, Trumble and Twembly, Attorneys at Law. All the agents in Our local office have names starting with T—it makes the bookkeeping much easier. Tell me the favor you wish, please?"

Professor Huxley J. Bradley waved the card away.

"How'd you do that trick—whisky floating through the air?"

Twembly's lips made a little sound. "Really, I couldn't reveal a third order power to you if you had the most desirable life essence in this universe. It's strictly against regulations."

"What regulations?"

"The regulations they make." Twembly oozed forward. "You'll have to pick something else. Money, fame, good looks—you know, the usual thing."

Bradley shook his head so vigorously that his curly dark hair wiggled into a tangle and fell down across his flushed broad forehead.

"No, I don't want any of those things." He was feeling expansive and it was nice. "I want to get in the Army and slap the Japs." He pointed his fingers and sighted over his extended thumbs, sweeping the room in a prolonged burst while his tongue made br-r-r-ring noises. He jumped up and ran his long slim fingers through his hair. He waved a generous hand around the bedroom.

"You see all these books? Books all about music. I teach it day in and night out at the University. Music—music. When Dean Fritterton told me not to write that book on 'Origin Of Jazz Music'—I wrote it anyhow. Now the faculty won't even speak to me. You know something?" He closed one eye and looked at Twembly. "I've almost finished a book that when it's published—they'll throw me out of the University. It's a book about Voodoo music, witch-doctor melodies that drive evil spirits out of the sick. It's supposed to work. I just got a real authentic witch-doctor horn."

He stumbled over to a queer shaped instrument hanging on the wall.

"It blows just like a trumpet."

Bradley put the horn to his lips. His cheeks tightened. He began to blow a spine-chilling melody.

"Stop it!" screeched Twembly as his finger-ring burst into flaming blue-white brilliance. He jumped up and snatched away the instrument. He trembled as he put the thing down and controlled his voice with effort.

"You must be more careful," he said, pulled out his pocket handkerchief and sneezed repeatedly. Twembly's eyes were running wet.

"Voodoo music," said Bradley solemnly. "Got lots of books on that stuff. I like Moodoo vusic—" He paused with a surprised look on his lean face. He corrected, "I mean Voodoo music—I got my tang all tongled up."

Twembly pulled himself together. "You mean you got your tongue all tangled up. What about this favor you desire?"

Professor Bradley produced a resonant hiccough.

"What's the price for this favor?"

"Your life essence—the sub-electronic force in you called life."

"In the condition it's in?"

"In the condition it's in!"

"What do you want to do with it? I wouldn't want to die for a favor."

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"You won't die—yet! We have a use for vital life forces and are agreeable to bargain well with you. But it is necessary that you are willing."

SLOWLY Bradley accepted the fact with a solemn nod and let it digest.

"Prove it," he said. "Do something—different."

The fat man grunted to his feet. "Certainly. That's more like it and is the usual method of procedure. How about a few minor physical changes as a start?" He smiled, and did something to the ring. He snapped his fingers and vanished.

Bradley sat there. He squinted at Twembly's empty clothes on the floor and then looked behind him. No Twembly!

"Hey!" said Bradley and snapped his own fingers. Nothing happened.

The professor was about to get up and look under the discarded clothing when he jumped—startled! A flock of small pigeons, no larger than bumble-bees, whirred past his nose like a covey of flushed quail! Bradley sneezed and twisted his neck to follow their looping flight around the room.

The miniature pigeons melted into little white horses with green wings and swooped to a skilful landing on his desk.

"Really!" said Bradley. Tiny hoofs made clattering noises as the winged horses cantered around among his papers. "Really!"

Unexpectedly, the winged horses buzzed into the air and hummed through a bewildering evolution of everything that walked, flew or swam while Bradley's nervous system wound itself around his spine.

Finally, after he had ducked a precise formation of winged tanks, complete with propellers and other whirring gadgets, that zoomed at his dodging head, there was a brittle pop—and Mr. Twembly landed gracefully in the center of the room. His pink body glistened with trickling beads of perspiration. The ring flashed as he made a peculiar gesture and his clothes scrambled in an eager fashion around his tubby figure.

"How did you like it?" inquired Twembly. "That demonstration is my specialty. Quite a work out, but it's a pleasure really—and I do think it has a nice impressive finish with a build up. I picked that last bit up from another agent in Xenon an eon or so ago."

CHAPTER II

Matrix Specialist

FOR the space of three heart thumps Bradley's feathers tickled his innards. Perspiration was running down his chest.

"Now look here!" His voice shook as he put the bottle down carefully. Somehow, this all seemed highly irregular. "Is this really on the level?"

"Fiddle-faddle!" exclaimed Twembly in irritation. "This is no time to diddle-daddle. Don't tell me I have to offer more proof?"

"All right," said Bradley abruptly. "The Army turned me down, and I did want a new body so I could fight."

"A new body?" Twembly groaned. "Really, Professor Bradley, I wish you would choose something else. I've just joined this branch of Life Psyche, Incorporated and bodies are a trifle out of my line. We'd have to go down to headquarters for a thing like that and Mr. Tramble is a very hard representative to deal with. We'd have to go to the trouble of making up a matrix and all that."

Twembly fingered his watch chain.

"Won't you be satisfied with money or the usual stuff? I could fix that in a minute. Maybe there's a girl you want, or you might be interested in trying our Special Inducement."

"Could you really give me a new body?" said Bradley eagerly, and did a lot of leaning forward. Air, alone, is an exceedingly poor support for excessive leaning but he didn't hurt himself much. He only fell out of his chair.

Twembly pursed his lips. "Oh, I suppose it could be arranged. But I told you we'd have to go down to headquarters. Why don't you take something less complicated?"

Bradley pulled himself up the leg of the bed. He shook his head.

"Body or nothing." His tongue felt thick.

Twembly's facial muscles tugged until they produced a deep frown.

"We'd have to have Dr. Trumble make up the matrix," he said.

"Who's Dr. Trumble?"

"He used to be a witch-doctor before we gave him the proper scientific training. He assembles and files the matrixes to make it legal and binding. A form of contract."

A spark flared in Bradley's eyes. He directed an unsteady finger at Twembly.

"He used to be a real—authentic—witch-doctor?"

The fat man snorted. "That witch-doctor stuff is now mostly superstition. But in the old days, due to the fact that some of the first witch-doctors stumbled onto some facts that hindered and interfered with Our business here—we invited the best ones into Our firm. Their natural talent with training makes things just dandy."

Bradley chuckled softly at first. Then a rich laugh rumbled around in his chest before it exploded into a hiccough.

"Beg pardon," he said and ambled over

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to the window. He opened it and gorged his lungs on the fresh air. He cleared his throat,

"Seemed to be getting close in here. I mentioned witch-doctors."

His tongue, he thought, seemed capable of performing in a well-behaved manner again.

"I have always wanted to meet a bona-fide witch doctor," Bradley told Twembly. "I wanted to consult him about the chapters in my new book on—" he said it carefully, "—Voodoo music. The book is finished except for a few minor details and it has been difficult for me to get the exact intonation, tonal qualities, vibratos and such, merely from ancient manuscripts. I can actually play some of the melodies now, but I'm not satisfied. Do you suppose Dr. Trumble would help me?"

"Well?"

The fat man deliberated. He studied Bradley as he whisked the bottle to him with a clever gesture. His throat made gurgling noises as he swallowed and his yellow-eye-flecks danced.

"You couldn't expect him to give you free advice," he said at last.

"If I make this bargain with you will I get to meet him personally?" interrupted Bradley.

"You certainly will," said Twembly. "Pour yourself another drink."

Bradley splattered a drink into the yawning glass.

"Could I turn the body back in to your firm after the war? When I'm through with it?"

"Perhaps—perhaps."

Bradley drained his whisky and thumped the glass down.

"Then I'll do it. What happens next?"

TWEMBLY'S soggy little body contracted in a long sigh. "Do you have a phone? Thank you." He dialed. "Hello. This is Twembly—Horace Twembly. You don't have to look it up. I just joined this branch from Xenon. Just give me the Pick-up Department." He rolled his eyes toward Bradley. "I don't know what section of space they're getting Our office help from these days. The help situation is becoming—hello—hello—Pick-up? I'm about to make a pick-up from Eight-fourteen Sunnyside. That's right. Look up the specifications for this locality please. . . Eh? . . . Wait a minute."

Bradley watched Twembly fumble in his pocket for a pencil and then scribble something carefully on the apartment wall.

"Check," he said into the phone. "I've got it. Notify Mr. Tramble I'm bringing in a new account and Dr. Trumble will have to make up a matrix. That's right. Thank you and gryyph!" He cradled the phone and waggled his head at Bradley. "You see? This makes it a lot of bother, Professor Bradley. Now I'll have to cut them in on a larger percentage."

"Larger percentage? On what?"

"Your life-psyche," sighed Twembly and then grunted himself to his flat feet. "There'll hardly be enough to go around on this basis. Fifteen per-cent here, fifteen per-cent there," he grumbled, "it's certainly not like the old days with all these new fangled regulations and red tape."

He waddled to the bedroom door leading into the living room.

"This door faces west, doesn't it?"

Bradley swallowed. "Look, I'd like to know a little more about it. What about this business of my paying off? Is it unpleasant?"

"Well, I never saw a human being yet who liked it." Twembly removed a small metal box from his pocket and fastened it to the door knob. He unreeled a long black wire which had bulbs like Christmas tree lights at regular intervals and draped it around the doorway. "But you do get your compensations. We aren't entirely unethical. You receive the favor you desire, and you have a chance of escaping payment. It's only a small chance, of course. That's all in the regulations They make and Mr. Tramble will take that up with you in a few moments. But as I said, it's not like the old days. There's too much wild competition and red-tape."

"What do you mean—a small chance of escaping?" asked Professor Bradley. He jumped as the phone burped and gathered the fuzzy nightshirt about him as he picked up the receiver.

"Hello, yes. This is Huxley Bradley. . . Who? . . . Well—"

He looked at Twembly who had just finished fastening the peculiar wire around the doorway.

"I'm busy right now. How about tomorrow? That will be fine. Goodby." Bradley frowned in puzzlement. "An individual I never heard of. He said it was most important for him to see me. A Mr. Blossom."

"Blossom?" Twembly's pink cheeks blanched. "Professor Bradley, get dressed. There's no time to diddle-daddle!"

"What's the hurry?" asked Bradley in a solemn baritone as he poured himself another drink and downed it. "I'm feeling very, very much better."

He snatched up his pants and tried to put his right foot in the proper leg. He floundered, then finally sat down on the floor to complete the process.

"I feel pretty, pretty good," he said owlishly to Twembly. "Who's Blossom?"

"A cheap competitor," snapped Twembly in irritation and pulled Bradley to his feet manhandling him into a brown tweed coat. "Let's get out of here."

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He padded over to the waiting doorway. His lips puckered up like a pink rose-bud and a whistle, baffling in its cadence, trilled an exotic melody. Up and down it went, over and over. The Christmas-tree-like lights began to glow softly.

"That's a pretty tune." Bradley tried to imitate it. His own whistle, in unison with Twembly, skidded occasionally, but it was close.

The doorway flickered. Twisting threads of blackness darted snake-like from the bulbs into a tangled mesh. Inky tendrils writhed among the threaded blackness to melt into a solid pulsing curtain of dark nothingness. The doorway was a yawning hole of blackness, and jet black.

BRADLEY'S whistle peeped into startled silence. He drew back a step.

"Get going," ordered Twembly, seizing him by the arm and pushing him toward the waiting blackness.

"Now wait a minute—not so fast." Bradley tried to jerk his arm free. "I'll just walk into my own living room."

Twembly pushed him headlong into the blackness.

"Get going!" he insisted.

The darkness was sticky and gooey and smelled like sour cream. Also it had a motion of its own, as if Bradley were swimming in warm molasses. He grunted in protest as he felt Twembly give him another firm push, a personal push.

The gooey darkness snapped away like rubber, and Bradley jerked his head around. He wasn't in his living room. He was in the waiting room of a mahogany-walled business office.

Directly before him he saw a heavy door labeled:

TRAMBLE, TRUMBLE

and

TWEMBLY

Attorneys at Law

Bradley felt Twembly propel him through the door and a blonde secretary sitting behind a neat desk hurriedly put down a much-folded magazine.

She dimpled. "Yes?"

"It's all right, Miss Twinkle," said Twembly. "We want to see Mr. Tramble."

Miss Twinkle's cherry-red lips parted, and a tiny pink tongue flicked out for an instant.

"Is this a collection or a new account?" she inquired.

Bradley ducked a formation of winged tanks and things

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Her nostrils quivered ever so slightly. "He's cute." The blue ring on her finger shot out sudden sparks of fire.

Twembly stiffened. "He's a new account and none of your snallfness. You get your regular payment. Commission accounts are not your concern."

The secretary tossed her blonde head.

"The company does declare dividends occasionally. How am I to know?"

Her inquisitive blue eyes never left Bradley.

Professor Bradley staggered. "What's this snallfness?"

"First door to your right," said Twembly soothingly. "Pay no attention to her. She'll get her share."

He pushed Bradley through a door marked: APPLICATIONS. He closed it behind them with a definite snap.

The brittle-faced man poised behind the low desk jerked up his head to look. He was sharp-nosed, with a narrow head twisted erect like an eagle. The pupils of his eyes were huge, surrounded by a deep sea-green iris wherein swirled dancing flecks of yellow.

"Twembly?" The word was snapped like a rifle-shot. "Excellent work. Congratulations." He bit the words off. "I consulted Professor Bradley's file since you called. He'll make an excellent client." Buttoning his egg-yellow sport jacket he turned to Bradley, lips smiling. But his eyes remained cold.

"My name's Tramble. In charge of things here in general. What sort of an account did you wish to open?" Each word was pointed and evenly spaced as machine-gun bullets. The professor noticed he, too, had a blue ring.

Foggy, Bradley took another look at him and shivered.

"Now see here—let's don't rush things."

Swi-i-ish!

A side door slammed open and a wizened, dark-skinned man, wearing various heathenish gadgets, bounced in with a small black bag. He had striped trousers, a single button coat, and an ascot tie. His morning clothes were impeccable. He threw a brief nod at Twembley and pushed Bradley into a chair.

"Well—well!" He eyed Bradley with the air of authority and began to set up a machine on the low desk. "Shouldn't be difficult at all. Have it ready in a moment." He sounded slightly Irish—or Oxfordish, mixed, like an omelette of accents.

With the speed of an expert, Dr. Trumble clamped a bracelet to Bradley's left wrist and plugged in a wire from the machine on the desk.

"So you're that Professor Bradley who wrote 'Origin of Jazz Music'?" he went on. "Very interesting book, that. Very."

HE ADJUSTED wavering dials and a low hum filled the room.

"What's he going to do?" asked Professor Bradley in a weak voice.

"This is Dr. Trumble," Twembly answered soothingly. "He's making up your matrix according to the contract." Twembly made sounds which were evidently intended to be a hearty laugh. "You just need a drink," he added, turning to a cabinet behind him. He sloshed a glass to overflowing. "This is a bit strong, but it'll pick you up, I think."

Bradley accepted the glass and glanced at Twembly doubtfully.

"Feel dizzy," he mumbled. Then as Twembly continued to smile and nod, he closed his eyes and drained the glass. He strangled thoroughly.

Twembly thumped him on the back and turned to Tramble. "Had to bring him here because it's a little out of my line." He threw some papers on Tramble's desk. "Wants a new body and I wasn't familiar with your procedure here."

Tramble jerked his head in a quick nod and picked an invisible speck from his egg-yellow sport coat.

"It's almost closing time. Make it fast. Not much business on Sundays." He twisted to Bradley. "You want a new body. Any specifications?"

Bradley roused himself with effort.

"Don't know about all this—feel woozy." He raised a hand to his head. "Think I'll go home."

"Nonsense. Our bargain is entirely legitimate. You want a favor. We can grant it."

Bradley had difficulty in focusing his eyes on Tramble. "Want a new body—Army didn't like this one. Can I get a good one?"

"Well, of course, like everyone else, we're having Our troubles these days getting material." Tramble's fingers drummed the polished surface of his desk. "But I assure you that We don't use any of these new synthetic force-field substitutes that some of our cut-throat competitors try."

"Like Blossom?" said Bradley drowsily.

"Blossom?" Tramble's fingers stopped. "What do you know about him?"

"Better get his life vibration exact," Twembly muttered to Dr. Trumble, who was absorbed in jotting down information from the calibrated dials. "Blossom telephoned him just before we took the Pick-up here."

Dr. Trumble's black face frowned. "I'll get them immediately." He lifted Bradley's head. "Just a few hairs, Professor Bradley."

"Oh, no, you don't!" Bradley ducked. He threw his arms over his head. "Not until I know more about this."

Dr. Trumble's thick lips writhed back to expose sharp yellowed teeth. He looked at Tramble. "Wouldn't be legal without his

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consent. Have to get the blood and fingernails anyhow."

Irritably, Tramble shrugged. "Professor Bradley, We are Life Psyche, Incorporated, and we deal with the vital life-forces of human beings. It's all strictly business. What planet we come from doesn't concern you. The legal end of it is important. All you should be concerned with is getting your favor. After a certain period of time and certain conditions have been complied with, I am sure your life-essence will be of far more use to Us that it will to you. That's reasonable, isn't it?"

Bradley managed a foggy look around the room. His mind was too drowsy to follow the conversation, but something kept telling him that he should be more alert. He made an attempt to rally.

"It doesn't make sense. Why shouldn't the rest of the world know about this?" His tongue failed him.

"If you tried to tell the rest of humanity, they wouldn't believe you. Of course if they did believe you, they'd want to do business with Us."

Tramble's fingers drummed on the desk top again. "We Darkonians like the situation the way we have it now," he went on. "We have just about as much business on this planet as we can handle with the present help situation. I assure you we are a reputable Universe-wide concern. Our interests control some of the biggest Earthian newspapers, secretly of course, and We control the problems of supply and demand as We see fit."

Bradley let the idea swim around.

"Demons supposed to live under the ground, not on top, in lawyer's offices," he remarked.

"Come now, Professor Bradley. I would expect more logic from you. We are not demons. We are Darkonians and couldn't live underground. That's not logical and besides it would be exceedingly uncomfortable. Humans have a powerful life force. Therefore, someone must handle things. Matters would get terribly confused otherwise."

Cli-i-ink!

It was Twembly with another drink. He brought a double-shot. He gave it to Bradley, who coughed loudly from the effects, then weakly leaned his head back against the chair.

"If you say so," said the Professor. "If you say so."

"It's remarkable," said Twembly in hushed tones. "For a man who doesn't drink he's a sponge. Will the concentration of alcohol affect his matrix, Dr. Trumble?"

The black specialist shook his head. Bone bangles hanging from his earlobes rattled. "I've got his vibration exact. But I'll need some physical samples from his body to complete the matrix."

Tramble hitched forward.

"Get those basics, now." he whispered. He reared back. "Professor Bradley, what sort of a body have you in mind?"

Bradley watched Dr. Trumble clip his fingernail with an expert flourish.

"What's he doing?" asked the Professor.

"Just the requirements We need to finish the matrix. You want things legal, don't you?"

Listless, Bradley pawed the air. "What about the payment?"

Tramble picked up a heavy leather-bound dictionary. He moved over.

"All you have to do is chose three words at random from this dictionary. As long as you don't say the three words you will choose aloud—in the same sentence—you may use the body without interference from Us." He shot a look at Twembly. "Or from other companies, once the matrix is legally filed and recorded. What sort of body, please?"

"Something different," said Bradley carelessly. "Hey! What's the idea?"

Dr. Trumble had pricked his ear with a bone needle. Professor Bradley sprang to his feet and staggered against the desk, white with fear.

CHAPTER III

The Bargain Completed

DR. TRUMBLE slammed Bradley down in the chair and squeezed the drop of blood oozing from the wound into a tiny test tube.

Tramble's thin lips cracked into a smile. He rubbed his bony hands.

"That will do it. File that matrix immediately in Our private file. This will make Blossom furious." He cleared his throat. "Everything has been attended to quite legally, Professor Bradley. The body will be deposited in your apartment as soon as the Make-up Department assembles it. You may now choose the words." He extended the heavy dictionary.

Bradley's lean face was twisting and he arched his back.

"Something hurts—inside." He struggled to his feet. "What'd you do to me?" He tried to yank off the bracelet and failed.

"The pain?" inquired Dr. Trumble in a professional tone. "That's a psychic-hook. You'll get used to it. If the pain doesn't subside to a lower level in a few days, come back and I'll see if I can give you a better adjustment."

He bounced toward the door, then stopped.

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His yellowish teeth glistened against dark purple gums. "You will find it impossible to remove that bracelet and if you feel a tug on that psychic-hook every hour—on the hour—don't get worried. That hook by means of the bracelet is attached to Our Bookkeeping Department and it enables Our girls to look in on you wherever you are and see what you're up to. It helps to keep Our records straight."

"You mean they can look in and see whatever I'm doing?" Bradley flushed. "No privacy?"

"Don't worry. Our girls in that department get very broadminded. Good day." Dr. Trumble went out.

"Wait a minute," exploded Bradley, "I wanted to ask you about some Voodoo music!" But Dr. Trumble was gone.

"Choose your words." Tramble was firm. "That psychic-hook won't bother you—providing you don't try to stray too far out of this district. Choose!" He pushed the book forward.

Bradley shook himself. "As long as I don't say the three words aloud in the same sentence, I'm safe?"

"With certain provisions I won't bother you with now. You'll learn them soon enough."

"Don't suppose it makes much difference," mumbled Bradley, and flipped through the pages rapidly, pointing as he went.

Tramble snapped the book shut with a bang.

"You chose able, hat and ink. Thank you." He scribbled a memo on his desk and handed Bradley a card. "You may call me if your psychic-hook brings on any abnormal complications other than its natural purpose." He strode to the door and turned to Twembly. "That will be forty per-cent for you, Twembly. Twenty-five per-cent to me and fifteen per-cent to Dr. Trumble for his services. The remaining twenty per-cent will be divided among the staff for overhead. Good night." The door slammed.

Twembly shook his head. "Robbery!" He glanced at Bradley. "And you started out as my private account. That body will be in your apartment when you return. I'll be seeing you—and soon I hope. The physical samples from your body will be kept alive in a culture and used as a nucleus for your psychic hook to function."

Bradley roused himself. "What happens if I say those words?"

"If you do—one of the Collectors that handles Our accounts will appear and inform you that you have one hour left before We collect. That's another one of those new regulations that I don't approve of. They warn you—and by the time We get it—the psyche is in a pretty tenuous condition from worry." His fat face grew solemn. "It's not like the old days. Come on, I'll put you in a taxi." Twembly led him to the door.

Bradley halted as Twembly locked the door and stared at the secretary who was closing her desk. "Is she a demon too—in human flesh?"

"Please—not demon. She is Darkonian."

Twembly pocketed the key. "We need office help who understand the situation so We can pay off. Coming along?"

"You go ahead." Bradley reeled against the door.

Twembly shrugged a fat shrug and waddled off.

Mentally, Bradley made an effort to squeeze his brain. He had to get a grip on himself, to try and find out more about this situation. Things had gone a trifle too fast and they didn't seem just right. The blond secretary might be of some assistance. He walked up to her, swaying slightly.

"I beg your pardon."

"The name's Twinkle," she said, powdering her nose.

"Twinkle?"

She dimpled. "Mary Twinkle."

BRADLEY watched her smooth her lipstick with the tip of her little finger.

"Does everybody's name around here start with a T?" he asked her.

"Yes, that's wrong." She maneuvered a hat onto her head that looked like a salad. She stuck things in it.

"Wrong?" he said unsteadily.

Mary Twinkle's blue eyes twinkled and she laughed. "I mean that's right. You see, to a Darkonian, right is wrong-and wrong is right. It gets confusing sometimes when I forget I'm talking to a human." She began to straighten the seams in her stockings. "Every agent's name, on this planet, starts with a T because it's supposed to make the bookkeeping simple." She shrugged and manfully picked up an oversized purse. "Me—I'd prefer the alphabet system."

Bradley studied her. "Are you really a devil in human flesh?"

"Darkonian," she corrected.

"Really?" Bradley tried to look properly awed.

"There's a difference," she sniffed. "That demon stuff is superstition. Anyhow, what'd you expect—jinni?"

She started to walk down the corridor and Bradley stumbled ahead of her to tug at the handle of a square green door.

Faintly, he could hear a low buzzing sound seeping through the door. And the continuous snap and crackle of tiny electrical relays.

Twinkle slowed. She looked at him with a curious smile.

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"You don't want to go in there, do you? Not yet—anyhow?"

Bradley pulled at the handle. "I didn't come in this way, but it's all right."

"For your information, that's the room where all the office help relax in Their natural bodies," said Twinkle in a soft voice. "Especially you might not like it when We get paid."

Bradley snatched his hand away as if the handle had suddenly become infected.

"That's where We go when We have a little fun. These facsimile human bodies we wear get boresome. They are so limited and fragile." She turned to the right and her high heels made clicking noises like a typewriter. "You'll find out what's in there someday!"

Bradley caught up with her. "That's what I want to talk to you about. I just joined the firm—as a client, it seems. I would like to clarify a few things."

Twinkle pressed the elevator button. Her awning-like eyelashes dipped and then raised as she looked Bradley over.

"You're either awfully drunk or awfully trusting to make any bargains with Mr. Tramble about anything. I know! But I'll discuss it with you—or anything, over a platter of drinks. You got enough dough on you for the Skyline Club?"

"I have," replied Bradley as the elevator door roared open. "You see, I made a little money from a book I wrote about the origin of jazz music. I used to go to the Skyline Club several nights a week to listen to the band there and gather material."

"No kidding?" murmured Twinkle and smoothed her skirt down firmly over her hips as she entered the elevator. "You are rather good looking. Do tell me more. . . ."

The Skyline Club was high. So were the prices. So were the people—and Twinkle. But Professor Bradley was low, quite low.

There was a dance floor, a band, tablecloths and tables, and smoke and noise.

"Hey there!" Twinkle finished her fourth Martini and reached over to pat Bradley's hand. "Now don't be down spirited, Professor. Maybe if you took a drink you'd feel better or maybe I shouldn't have told you all about that stuff. Brace up now!"

Professor Bradley snapped his mind back into an awareness of where he was. His face was strained.

"I was thinking about that parasite situation you told me about. It scares me."

He looked around for his untouched drink and downed it with a gulp. It made him gag. "What's the name of that planet again, the one you come from?"

"Darkonia," said Twinkle. "It's one of the inner planets revolving around the star you call Polaris—the North Star. I'm not so dumb, Professor. I've absorbed a lot about science and history. Our first space ship landed here on Earth seven thousand years ago."

"Why didn't you let us humans know about it?"

WITH a smile Twinkle looked at Bradley in a compassionate manner.

"We can't. Our evolution of race has a different basis than your carbon-protoplasmic life cycle. Since we developed as a parasitic-race, we are forced to live off the vital life force of our intelligent hosts. If we hadn't been permitted to come here to Earth, Our race would have disintegrated."

"But it's a frightening thing to realize." Bradley hesitated. His voice sank to a whisper. "It's awful to learn another race has lived among us humans for thousands of years without us knowing it—as parasites. That's shocking!"

"What's so strange or shocking about it?" countered Twinkle. "You have the same situation here on Earth among almost every branch or specie of life that covers the globe. Your oceans are crowded with swarms of

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parasitic fish that attach themselves to other fish and will die if the attachment is broken. They get their nourishment and life power that way. They can't help it. That's the way their metabolism is set up. You have the same thing among your Earthian plants and flowers, such as orchids and the mistletoe on your trees, and small ticks that live on warm blooded animals, and I don't know how many other hundreds of insects. Those are proven, scientific facts you, yourself, know and can't deny. Is it so strange to accept the fact similar relationships must exist among organisms higher up the evolutionary scale, between you humans and Us?"

Bradley repressed a shudder. "How do you do it? Why should you victimize us humans?"

"Our real bodies are rather tenuous in nature, almost like a mist to your eyes, and like all life processes it is electrical in nature. Our science is well advanced and, long ago, We discovered that the sub-electronics, which form the basic life force, are really the main key to every cause and effect that goes on in the Universe. You humans have already discovered the Law of the Conservation of Energy. Everything that exists will always exist in one form or another. Right?"

"Right," said Bradley somberly.

"All right," said Twinkle. "You humans have intelligence—and so do we. Intelligence can never die and just disappear. That's the law. The sub-electronic pattern of intelligent life is too complex to be created artificially. All of our science and Our lives are based on it. We use it the same as you use crude, raw electricity in your civilization."

"But we don't use electricity to keep us alive."

"Oh, no? You get it in another form from your food, don't you? Just as we cannot manufacture artificially what is necessary to keep Us alive, neither can you."

Bradley looked at her. "You sound very sober."

"My human body—although an imitation—might not be sober, but my mind is. "Don't you see what I'm driving at? It's really not complicated at all."

"Perhaps," said Bradley slowly. "Our human bodies can't absorb chemicals or life forces direct. We have to go about it in an involved cycle of letting a seed absorb those things. Then we plant the seed and the seed continues to absorb the necessary chemicals and energy from the ground and the sun through photosynthesis and grows into a plant. Then we humans either eat the plant direct and absorb that particular vitamin, or whatever you want to call it. Or else we feed the plant to a warm-blooded animal and there it is changed into proteins and so forth in order that our own bodies can absorb the necessary elements for us to live."

"On the other hand We Darkonians can absorb all We need to live, and keep Our science functioning, from you," answered Twinkle. "That's logical, Professor, you must admit. All life forms, in some degree or other, live off the products of other life forms. The plants and steers don't know the what or why of these things you humans are doing to them either."

Bradley shivered in spite of himself. "Tell me about those rings."

"Hey, there's Steve Benton," Twinkle cried. "He's one of the trumpet men in the band." She fluttered her free hand at someone behind Bradley. "Yoo-hoo, Stevie—come here!"

A slim, dark haired musician walked over to the table and was introduced. He smiled at Bradley and pulled up a chair to sit down.

"So you're Bradley," he said enthusiastically. "I read that book of yours and it was solid, pops. I used to see you in here and wonder what you were doing copying off stuff. Why don't you sit in a set? You play trumpet, don't you? You can take my stand—I'm on second."

"Well, really!" Bradley glanced at Twinkle.

"Go on, Hux, show 'em a few things."

STEVE Benton peered over his shoulder at the musicians climbing back on the stand.

"It'll be okay, man," he said to the professor. "We usually have sessions on Sunday night. A lot of the boys sit in. There's not many ickies in the joint on Sunday nights."

Bradley brightened. "I'd like to try something. Do you play the Blues?"

"Are you kidding?" Steve seemed hurt.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Sure, we play the Blues. What style you mean?"

"It's something different I've discovered in some old manuscripts. It has the usual twelve bar cadence, but the harmonic sequence is unorthodox."

"New Orleans?"

"Not quite. I know all Blues are based on old Negro music, but this goes farther back than that. Extreme primitive, you might say. Can I try it?"

Steve waved carelessly. "You tell the piano man. He can fake or follow anything. My horn's on the stand."

"Thanks." Bradley finished his drink and made his way between crowded tables to the bandstand. What Twinkles had told him had given him a jolt and he was anxious to divert his thoughts. Also the chance to play with a professional orchestra thrilled him for he'd never had such an opportunity before.

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Furthermore it would be an excellent opportunity to try out a certain melody he'd discovered in the "Old Music" section of the library. These experienced musicians would be quick to sense and provide a good background in some sort of ad-lib fashion. This would fix the melody firmly in his ear. Strange that he had never screwed up courage to sit in a jam-session before. Could those drinks be having more of an effect than he estimated?

The piano man listened to his instructions.

"Okay, pops. You start it after I take four bars and we'll follow you. How about B flat? Good?"

Bradley nodded and climbed on the bandstand. He picked up Steve's trumpet, jiggled the valves a few times and opened the spit-key. He blew bubbly noises to clear the horn. He heard the piano man start a four bar vamp. Bradley rubbed his lips with the back of his hand, and began to play as couples started for the dance floor.

The first moaning note had barely emerged from the bell of the horn when Bradley felt a sharp pain sweep over him in a sickening wave of white-hot anguish. He wrenched the instrument from his lips and clutched the piano. His bracelet was tingling, and his stomach was an agonized knot. His strength gushed out of him like blood from a spurting artery.

He gritted his teeth as he felt a vicious pull. It tugged as if a sharp pointed hook was buried deep within his vitals. The darkness behind his closed eyes sparkled with flashes of red. Amid his pain he had a frightful thought.

Dr. Trumble's Bookkeepers were checking up on him already!

CHAPTER IV

Twinkle's Melting Point

UNDER the shock of the discovery and the sharp mangling sensation of the psychic barb in his chest, Professor Bradley nearly dropped the musical instrument he was holding. For a short time he had almost forgotten about the Darkonians and the bargain he had made. Now the memory returned to his mind with redoubled force.

"What's the matter, hunk?" The piano man was yelling at him. "Go ahead and take it." Rhythmically, the pianist had kept vamping.

Bradley nodded and forced his body into an upright position. He squeezed the horn in a firm grip. As he raised it to his lips again, he noticed with a desperate sense of shock, that his body was drenched with perspiration.

Anger surged through him like a revitalizing flood. He would play, hook or no hook. He saw that the dancers were shuffling as usual, two and two, each huddled in their own private world of rhythm.

His trumpet carved a melodic design into the pounding vamp. Low and throbbing it was. A softly moaning melody that began to weave restlessly. Vibrating sensuously, panting and crying. The smoke-stupefied atmosphere shivered as if invisible tears were dropping slowly, unseen, unwanted.

The piano man killed his vamp. He closed his eyes, deliberately imprisoning his senses in an alert universe of sound. His left hand sought out a bass pattern. The pattern became alive, prodding. The bass man listened a few bars and joined him. The trombone section rocked in their chairs and extended their slides to pick up the low counter pattern, punctuating it with a whipping rhythmic riff as the drummer kicked his metallic jungle of instruments into life with a savage monotonous pounding.

Bradley's eyes were closed. The pain was fading. The trumpet was throbbing against his lips. Wailing endlessly, over and over again.

The piano man's right hand now set the harmony and inspired the saxes with an idea as the trumpets pounced with a stinging bite into a screaming lick all their own.

It was old, that melody, and evil somehow. Crawling melodically in and out of that organized bedlam of rhythmic sound. Bradley could feel uneasy gooseflesh ripple over him like a hairy blanket with thousands of tiny pattering feet as the musicians' ideas began to unify and develop. Bradley played louder. Perspiration was running down his neck. The band background was solid now, and rhythmic. It mauled the air with an invisible paw arousing instincts that were old and shriveled and almost forgotten.

Bradley let himself go. The trumpet slurred into a primitive sound, sliding down and down and then up—up in a taunting laugh, wild and savage. The music was getting wild, twisting itself—snarling in an unholy chuckling mirth. Pulling and straining, the melody stung Bradley's lip muscles as it sucked itself into life from his breath, hot and warm.

"Bradley!"

It was Steve shaking him.

"You'd better take Twinkle home. She's sick, I think."

In a red daze, Bradley put the horn down and stumbled off the bandstand as the musicians went rhythmically on, engrossed in the now living thing he had started.

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"Solid, man, solid!" the bass man yelled to him.

Bradley nodded in a dumb fashion and threaded his way back to his table. He saw Twinkle standing up, clutching at the back of a chair for support. She looked lily-white around the ears. Bradley tightened himself to reality. He felt sober—very, very sober.

Twinkle sneezed. "Get me out of here," she managed to say. "Take me home—quick."

The check was paid. The doorman bowed. The checkered taxi-door slammed. Bradley wilted back in the seat and looked at Twinkle with gloom in his face.

"Dr. Trumble's Bookkeepers just made me realize what an efficient organization I've had the misfortune to entangle myself with. Patriotic motive or research reasons or not, I realize now that 'the hair of the dog' seems to have distorted my common sense."

"That horrible music," said Twinkle. "Horrible."

She shivered and rolled down the window.

"Voodoo music," replied Bradley absently.

"Well you shouldn't have played it!" she snapped. "I can hardly hold myself together."

THE taxi hummed along. Twinkle began to move the blue ring as if it hurt her.

"My foot feels funny," she said.

Bradley had been silent.

"You look human," he said abruptly. "Why?"

Twinkle shrugged. "It is necessary so that we may live among you peaceably. These rings we wear, pick up the power needed to hold these imitation bodies stable. It's some form of a complex force-field that is generated behind the green door in Our laboratories downtown and is broadcasted by a process somewhat similar to the elementary experiments you humans are performing now in small scale units of broadcasting power. Our first experiments were crude too. In fact, we made so many blunders at first that you humans still remember and speak of such things as superstitions of the Dark Ages."

"What?"

Twinkle laughed a short laugh. "We used to deal more openly with humans for right of access to their life forces in exchange for favors. Since We came from Darkonia—we were sometimes referred to as 'D-men'. It might sound like the word 'demon', but we aren't. Demons don't exist. Such a belief is extremely ignorant and unscientific."

Bradley motioned to the ring. "How does that thing work?"

A pained look flitted across Twinkle's face. "You must realize, Professor Bradley, that the universe is a big place occupied by thousands of different races of intelligent beings of all shapes and sizes. Some of them are quite young in their development, like you humans. But some are much older than even We Darkonians. Naturally many of the stronger races would try to exploit the lower races unfairly if some sort of Control hadn't been established."

This explanation staggered Bradley.

"Control?"

"Yes," Twinkle's voice sounded almost sad. "There is a Control that keeps the universe running on an orderly basis toward some unguessable ultimate destiny. Only Control knows what will be the final result. Even We Darkonians must abide by a certain pattern of regulations which were laid down for Us long, long ago when Our mental and scientific achievements advanced Us to the point where Control thought it necessary to come into contact with Us. No race is perfect. We Darkonians have Our weak points that We can change. That's another reason why We are forbidden to reveal any scientific discoveries to you humans. Each race must fight its own way up the ladder of evolution. I think you call it 'Survival of the Fittest'."

"You're evading my question about the ring."

"No, I'm not," she countered. "You just won't be able to understand all of it. But I'll try."

She held the ring up for him to see and the passing street lights glinted on its cool blue surface.

"It really contains an extremely tiny electronic circuit somewhat similar to one of your radio sets. In Our laboratories the vital life forces, which We have obtained legally, are broken down into their basic sub-electronic particles. They are different, from other electronic vibrations, having a cohesive force of intelligence, and have a tendency to cling together. Consequently they can be stored in delicate crystalline tubes something like you store an electrical potential in a condenser or tube or battery."

"But I still don't see how you use them."

"The storage tubes are exceptionally sensitive to vibrations and have a function similar to your own radio tubes," she went on. "By that I mean a small electrical potential can be amplified and increased to the point where you can use it in all manner of ways. That is what we do with your human psyches. They are powerful and—"

Her voice stopped unexpectedly.

"But what about the human's actual consciousness or ego?" asked Bradley.

Twinkle let out a scream.

"My foot! It's dissolving!"

"What?" Bradley's mind did a flip-flop.

Twinkle clutched him. "You've got to get me back to the office. Quick!"

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Bradley glanced at her and gasped. Her face seemed to be blurring and wavering as if he were looking at her through a broken glass lens. A faint mist, cloudy and swirling, outlined her figure with an alien halo.

"It was that horrible music you played." Her words were becoming jumbled and indistinct. "It did something to my ring. I'm not picking up enough power. If you don't get me back to the office I won't be able to hold myself together. My force-field is fading. A tube must have gone bad."

BRADLEY hardly heard her. He was beginning to shiver. A chilly dampness, as if borne on the breath of an icy wind was now starting to sweep through the interior of the cab. Twinkle's face was dissolving into —a—a—rainbow cloud!

The breaks and rubber tires squealed suddenly against the pavement. They squealed louder than the taxi-driver as the cab jolted to a halt.

The front door slammed. The driver fled. He must have been watching. Rear-vision mirrors sometimes reveal strange sights.

"Twinkle!" Bradley collapsed against the far end of the rear seat. "Don't do that!"

The Professor stared at her in horror.

The sudden dampness released into the cab was bad enough, but this was ghastly. Was Twinkle dying?

"Don't," he croaked.

Sluggishly the thing squirmed against him.

"Hux." Her thought seemed to burn into his reeling brain. "Help me. I can't hold myself together. That music nearly finished me."

Professor Bradley gagged. He managed to reach for the door handle.

"Hux!" The thought seared into him like a flashing white-hot rivet. "Don't leave me. I'm helpless."

Bradley's skin was twitching and crawling as if his body were infested with hairy little caterpillars. He flung open the door and tumbled out to the hard pavement, just as a policeman came stalking up.

"What goes on here, bud?" The policeman jerked Bradley to his feet. "What made the driver run away from you like that? They don't usually run off and leave their hacks deserted. Something funny must be going on—"

He looked into the interior of the cab. His eyes widened. They threatened to pop out from his head. Then he fainted! Yes, he definitely fainted!

"Hux!" Winged by desperation a message seemed to crackle into his brain. "Jump into that seat and drive me out of here."

Professor Bradley's jaw clamped shut. Wooden faced, without looking into the cab, he settled himself in the empty seat. After all, he thought grimly, the date had been his idea. He shifted gears, let in the clutch.

"Drive down to the office." Twinkle's thought was electric with urgency. "I'll have to go up to the room behind the green door."

"What do you mean by the office?" Bradley asked aloud.

"Where you were today." Her thought came to him distinctly. "Except for my right leg I can hold myself together. My right leg doesn't integrate the way it should so I'll have to go there to pick up some stable essence."

"Oh," replied Bradley blankly as he sent the checkered cab along the darkest streets. Block succeeded block. Whatever had possessed him to get tangled up in things like this? His scattered thoughts were dashing recklessly up and down their thought corridors trying to get back to their proper cells. Some of the crowded crossroads were jamming in struggling confusion.

Bradley knew he was sober. It all seemed like a dream—but that thing in the back seat wasn't a dream—it was a nightmare! Also that agonizing little pain way down inside of him—psychic-hook? Suppose they really had a legal claim on his psyche? Also the body—suppose it really was in his apartment at this moment? Then again, suppose he said those three words?

Bradley shivered. He should have known whisky would distort his judgment. He ought to send his judgment to the dry-cleaners and have the spots removed.

"Stop here, Hux," cut in her thought. "Right past this street light. We can go up the back way. There's a private elevator."

Bradley switched the life out of the car. He got out and avoided looking back as he walked up to the building. He heard the taxi door slam and then the thing that was part Twinkle and part thing approach. He heard the click of a high heel—click, then—squish, then—click, then squish—click—squish—click—squish. Was that Twinkle walking?

"Miss Twinkle!" Bradley heard himself say in a strained voice. "I think I had better go."

"Oh, no," came her ruthless message. "I might need you and I forgot my hat in the cab. Will you get it for me?"

PROFESSOR Bradley's knees were shaking. Realization flooded through him, that for the last ten minutes he had been holding himself at bow-string tension. Now a reaction was setting in. Weakness engulfed him.

"I'm afraid," he muttered. "I'm not able to get your hat—"

A warning bell clanged into furious activity inside his skull. Good heavens!

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"Able?" And "hat?"

Those words! Suppose he had said "ink?"

Professor Bradley sagged into the dark doorway. The shattering impact of the desperate warning his brain jammed into his already over-taxed nerve channels had tensed him for several heartbeats, and now that reflexive functions were beginning to meter the excess sugar and adrenaline in his blood back to normal, he felt empty, and limp, like a wet gunny-sack.

His nervous system was jangling with tangled cross currents like a Chinese telephone exchange. It had had enough. It wanted to go away and lie down and play dead for awhile.

Bradley felt Twinkle bundle him into the elevator while his mind tried delicately to withdraw its feet from the yawning abyss it had so narrowly stepped into. The elevator whined up and up.

The door opened. Click—squish—click—squish.

Bradley's tired mind protested. It didn't mind her following so much except for the squish part. Why couldn't she walk right? Click—squash—click—squash. It would be less gruesome.

The square green door.

"Push in on the handle," Twinkle's thought came. "Then pull!"

Bradley obeyed. The heavy door swung outward and he staggered. The same alien mist that had almost floored him in the cab swirled through the opening like the breath of a passing garbage wagon. It made him dizzy.

"Don't go away." Bradley caught Twinkle's message as she slithered around the edge of the door. "You can drive me home in that taxi as soon as I get myself together again. I've got enough essence left over from a client that paid off last week to do it nicely. It won't take long."

Bradley stared at the green door that Twinkle had left slightly ajar. Should he wait—or go now to that pretty little institution over the hill—the one with the high fence around it? He could ask for a trial fit in the straightjackets they were wearing this season! How could he stand here and accept such a conversation—if a voice in your attic could be called a conversation—like this and keep from chewing his finger-nails off clear up to the elbow? He didn't know. It must require self-control to manage such stresses on the sanity.

Bradley wished he smoked. Men were always supposed to smoke at a time like this, weren't they? Here he was waiting for a blond secretary to pull herself together by doing something with psychic essence left over from somebody, somehow, somewhere!

The back of his mind was tossing the idea around that it—the mind—must be composed of some remarkable gadgets to accept remarkable things as unremarkable. What was going on behind that square green door anyhow? Essence? Vital force?

"Ii-oohh-eeee!"

From behind the door came a distressing mental effect!

Silent screams! Could there be such things as silent screams?

Bradley shuddered. It wasn't exactly explainable but the screams were all the more terrible because they were unuttered.

The screams tasted sour and felt cold. Bradley didn't know which of his sensory channels was receiving the evidence of that alien agony, but it was horrible. It set his teeth on edge. The suffering that he sensed behind the green door washed into him like a suffering which is beyond human flesh to endure.

Again it came!

"Iii-ooohh—eeee-ah!"

Somehow, Bradley managed to stagger into the elevator and start it going down. He was alone. He was pressing on the floor to make it drop faster. So that was what Twembly meant when he said he "never saw a human yet who liked it!"

Now, as a brutal reminder, when he lurched outside into the cool air of early dawn, one of Mr. Tramble's broadminded bookkeepers sent him sprawling to the pavement with a vicious tug on the psychic-hook.

Just to see what he was doing!

CHAPTER V

Up in Bradley's Room

PROFESSOR Huxley J. Bradley inserted the key into the door of his apartment, and hesitated. His mind was clear now. In fact it was entirely too clear. His head ached with squadrons of midget dive-bombers swooping in and around the convolutions of his brain with all the noisy clatter and roar of what was a super-nova hangover.

No matter. He shook his head in annoyance. Suppose that body was in his apartment? Suppose Dean Fritterton knew that the faculty now had a professor of music who came in mornings, furnished complete with a hangover-hungover, a psychic-hook, and an extra body at no additional charge to the University? Bradley made a squint face and pushed the door open. He looked around the living room. Then he walked nervously into the bedroom.

At the doorway he stopped short with a gasp of surprise.

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It was there all right. A body was reposing on the bed.

Bradley flinched. By a desperate effort he took a second look. They had delivered a body all right! But it was a girl—long black hair, slim and—he stumbled to the bed and jerked the coverings hurriedly over the figure. A body would catch cold lying around with so few clothes on. They should have at least furnished it complete with accessories. Although he had noticed the middle finger of the right hand was furnished with one of the blue rings.

This was impossible—absolutely impossible! He'd better get that thing out of here before the maid came in to clean up. It was getting late, and if the faculty ever heard that he had a—girl in his room! Even if the body was imitation, no one would believe it wasn't alive.

Bradley collapsed into a chair. He began to crack his knuckles. The amazing little gadget in the back of his mind that persisted in looking on all this as normal whirred busily until it popped up with something.

"Just don't get excited," it said. "Don't get upset. Be calm and accept things."

Clear thought, Bradley decided, would be possible and solutions arrived at. Otherwise, it might become a situation of RUN—DON'T WALK, to the nearest psychiatrist. Very well.

Bradley decided he'd better phone Tramble and try to call this entire thing off. He better tell Tramble he didn't want to play any more. Bradley fished in his pocket for the card Tramble had given him. It read:

TRAMBLE, TRUMBLE AND TWEMBLY

Attorneys at Law
Ravenswood 7668
For night calls: Long Beach 8292

Bradley whirred the dial phone.

"Hello . . . Mr. Tramble? . . . This is Professor Bradley . . . Sorry to wake you up so early in the morning . . . I found that body like you said I would in my apartment . . . yes, but I've decided to call the entire thing off . . . Yes . . . What? . . . But Mr. Tramble! . . . Wait, Mr. Tramble! What do you mean a bargain's a bargain? . . . That's absurd . . . But it's a girl, Mr. Tramble."

Bradley listened impatiently.

"What?" he yelled. "You listen to me. Suppose I did say something different . . . Yes, but not that different . . . Now wait a minute—you can't do this to me . . . Mr. Tramble—Mr. Tramble!"

Furious, Bradley rattled the hook. He smashed the receiver into place.

"Hangs up on me," he muttered, "the dirty little Darkonian!"

He glanced in irritation at the shrouded figure on the bed. Somehow, he had to get that thing out of here. He couldn't very well carry it out over his shoulder like a sack of vegetables. Not in its present state of dishabille. He clenched his jaw.

The dial made whirring noises like a metallic rattlesnake.

"This is Bradley again . . . Now wait a minute . . . All right, so I'm sorry I woke you up. You promised me a new body and this thing doesn't fulfil your part of the contract. What good is a dead body? . . . What do you mean, it's not dead? . . . Well how can I use it. Look, Tramble, you promised—Oh? . . . Oh! . . . Hm-m-m . . . Yes, that might help, but, now wait—don't hang up—Tramble—"

Bradley slammed the receiver back in the cradle as the line again went dead. He cracked his best knuckle. Tramble said for him to just concentrate and his bracelet would give him power to transfer his mind into the new body. Astounding! It would be a good trick if it would work. At least he could walk the body out of the apartment and check it in a hotel for a time. Then he'd be able to transfer his mind back into his own body and, after he attended his classes, he could decide what to do next.

Very well, he'd try it. But first he'd have to concentrate.

QUIETLY Bradley's lanky body relaxed in the chair. He closed his eyes. Concentrate . . . ugh . . . ugh . . . uuuggghhh!

Hang it, nothing seemed to happen—except he felt chilly and his hangover was gone.

He opened his eyes and his mind exploded into spinning skyrockets when he saw himself sprawled in the chair across the room, head down, arms and legs drooping.

Good heavens! He'd killed himself!

Then, the skyrockets abruptly subsided as he realized he was over here lying in bed under a cover. Also he felt very, very peculiar, for the garments he was wearing were strange—one of them too tight and the other loose, flimsy and silken. How odd!

Bradley swung a leg from beneath the covers and stopped. For a shattering moment he just stared at the leg.

What a leg it was!

He inspected it in tingling surprise. It was hairless and smooth and comely. It certainly wasn't an imitation, either.

Professor Bradley sucked in his breath. Quickly, he looked up at the ceiling. He must be careful.

Awkwardly, but with deliberation, he wrapped the pink cover around him and got up and walked over to the mirror. The reflection was that of a girl. Long flowing black hair and astounded wide-set eyes

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stared back at him. The reflection was decidedly pretty. It was easy on the eyes. Very!

A wry thought came. He had a new body, and what a body! He pulled the cover closer about his supple figure. It would never, never do to let that cover slip—not in front of the mirror. Fake body or not. Not until he got used to the idea—if ever. Now to walk out of here and check in a hotel, transfer back to his own proper form, and get this mess settled once and for all.

Bradley sat down as disgustedly as the trim body would allow him on the edge of the bed. He couldn't check into a hotel clad mainly in a bedcover. Now what?

The practical part in his mind almost made clicking noises for five seconds. Then he had a solution. He'd change back to his own body and go out and buy some clothes. Would the bracelet, still on his own wrist, work both ways? Probably! Check . . . . Concentrate . . . . Uuuggghhh! Thu-u-d!

Professor Bradley, himself again, hangover and all, straightened up in the chair as he heard a body fall heavily to the floor. It was the girl—sprawled flat on the carpet. Hang it! He'd have to be more careful of his various bodies during the changeover process. Otherwise the wear and tear might prove considerable.

That bedcover—he should have fastened it.

Bradley felt his face redden as he lifted the dangling figure onto the bed and covered it up again. He looked at his watch. There should be some clothing stores open soon. He'd get some warm breakfast, some female garments and—

His mind refused to go further for the moment. He'd buy the clothes first and then worry.

He left the apartment, fastening the door carefully behind him.

"Yes, it was a fine day," he said to the elevator boy.

"Good morning," he told the stiff-shirted manager in the marble lobby. Later he ordered "Orange juice, ham and eggs, buttered rye toast and coffee," at the drugstore and then drank water until Finklestein's store opened up.

Bradley looked at the weathered sign:

CLOSING OUT SALE THIS WEEK ONLY!
THIS TIME WE MEAN IT!
FAMOUS FASHIONS

He buttoned his brown tweed coat, pushed through the door and walked up to the floorwalker.

"Beg your pardon, but I would like to purchase some"—Bradley hesitated, and then plunged—"some female dresses such as women wear."

The floorwalker looked at Professor Bradley like floorwalkers look at people. "What sort of clothes, young man?" he inquired. "We have many departments." His voice became dreamy as he droned: "Sports, evening wear, afternoon clothes, business frocks, tailored welding, returnable wedding garments, fitted riveting overalls, bargain bucking specials, and smart suits for slick chicks, junior miss or matron." He steadied himself, took a breath. "Perhaps I can help you. Who are they for?"

"Why, they're for—a friend." Bradley's teeth had caught the word "me" just in time. He'd have to watch himself. Plain facts would never do. He looked imploringly at the floorwalker. "I want a complete outfit. Lipstick and everything."

THE floorwalker nodded his head in floorwalker fashion.

"I understand, young man." He beckoned to a notebook-carrying salesgirl. "I'll appoint her a Personal Shopper and she will be able to assist you with your selections. A Finklestein service, free of charge." He clucked to the red-headed salesgirl. "Miss Muir, kindly help this gentleman with his purchases." He bowed, and walked off like floorwalkers sometimes do.

Miss Muir moistened the end of her pencil.

"If you will give me some idea as to what you have in mind?"

Bradley's mouth felt dry as if it were full of surgical cotton.

"Anything—anything that females wear. Just so I can get out of here. Cash."

"We can visit the suit department first," suggested Miss Muir. She led the way. "Several dresses, perhaps?"

"No, only one. You don't understand. It's for me, and I'll only need it long enough to get out of a mess."

"I realize I'm buying them for you," countered the Personal Shopper in a smooth monotone. "But I must have some idea as to size. What size do you think?"

Watching her, Bradley's mind struggled desperately with this problem. Then as he gazed at Miss Muir, his eyes suddenly brightened.

"When I'm a girl, I think I wear something just about your size," he blurted out.

Miss Muir stiffened. She clutched her notebook as she moved carefully to the opposite side of the Bargain Sale on Odd Sized Girdles counter.

"What did you say?" Her voice sounded strained.

Bradley shot a wild glance down between the Special Clearance counter and the

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Slightly Soiled Irregulars counter to the door. If only he could get out of here!

"I don't know what I mean," he chattered, very much flustered. "I'm a trifle upset—lobster last night and all that. I want a complete outfit so that a girl can sneak out of my room and check into a hotel without causing a scandal. You see, she's up in my apartment in bed and everybody knows I'm a bachelor." He stopped, turned scarlet and floundered.

"Eeeee—eek!"

It was a squeaky squeal, complete with an uprising inflection, a crescendo, and uplifted eyebrows. Plainly Miss Muir was shocked.

"No, wait!" Bradley reached into his pocket for that stuff that has such a soothing effect upon all excited females. "Here is some money. Buy me an outfit that will fit you and keep the change."

Miss Muir's round mouth relaxed into an oval.

"Well!" She fluffed her red hair. "I didn't realize. I was—that is—shall we continue?"

"Continue," breathed Professor Bradley. "By all means, continue."

Her pencil made busy scratching noises. "You will need a smart frock, coat, blouse, shoes and stockings, and lingerie.

"Lingerie?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Nothing." Bradley looked at his nails. "Continue."

"You'll want a hat, gloves, purse, and girdle."

Bradley cleared his throat.

"Yes, shoes. You brought your ration book, I trust. Did you say cosmetics?"

"Cosmetics?" His voice quavered uncertainly.

"Lipstick, powder, rouge. Will you be giving her a compact, too?"

Bradley snatched out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. He nodded.

"I'll have to have some idea of what she looks like. You must tell me the coloring of her eyes, hair and skin, you know."

Bradley squinted his eyes shut and then spoke through clenched teeth.

"Dark hair, pretty eyes—dark eyes, brown perhaps. Red lips and white teeth." He opened one eye. "I mean she's pretty, darned pretty."

"Skin?"

"Soft skin, very white, firm and smooth." He coughed as the Shopper looked at him with new interest. "Uh-h, medium."

Miss Muir started to say something, paused, and chewed her pencil.

Bradley gestured nervously.

"How much longer will this take?"

She flashed him a smile.

"You say she's just my size?"

"Oh!" Professor Bradley looked at Miss Muir in a judicious manner. "You're not at all bad either, yourself. Yes, I should say just about your size would be perfect."

Miss Muir snapped her notebook shut.

"You sit down over there and I'll have the outfit ready for you in a jiffy." She looked him over from head to toe approvingly and then hurried away.

CHAPTER VI

One Body Too Many

SELECTING a chair, Bradley sat down. He decided which fingernail offered the greatest chewing prospects and began to nibble at it.

"So far, so good," he thought.

What time was it? It should be about time for Tramble's Bookkeepers to fiddle with his heart-strings, or their psychic equivalent. It was beginning to look as if they didn't check up every hour, on the hour. In the meantime he should give some attention to not saying those three words, "able," "ink" and "hat."

He shuddered. Life Psyche, Incorporated were playing the game to keep all the marbles. Also that hat episode last night had been a close thing. But how could he have said "ink," too, and make sense. The idea was silly unless you had a macabre sense of humor. Probably would be best to try to figure out what sort of sentences could possibly include their use and then avoid saying them aloud. His incisor teeth had completed their devouring work on all available fingernails and he had a good hangnail going when Miss Muir staggered up with an armload of string-throttled bundles.

"There!" she said. She dumped them in his lap, hesitated and reluctantly vanished behind the Special Today Only counter.

Bradley took a last bite at the now stinging hangnail, hugged the packages, lumbered through the door, hurried to the apartment lobby.

"Good morning," he again said to the stiff-shirted manager, told the elevator boy, "Second floor," for practise, unlocked the door with a third hand somehow, and ambled into the bedroom. The body was still there, just like he'd left it.

He mangled the packages in a manner calculated to expose their innards—frothy innards. Bewildered, he spread the feminine intricacies around the room, draping them over chairs and lamps and furniture. He pivoted slowly on his heel.

There were so many things, and some of the articles seemed complex, tricky. He

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should have asked for a set of instructions. Did mothers give little girls home courses on how to manage them? Regardless of that, this was post-graduate stuff.

Professor Bradley propped himself in the chair with the studiousness of an engineer laying a bridge foundation. He was taking chances on breaking any bones by falling off seats. Hm-m-m. Perhaps a spread-eagle position had a higher safety factor. Was it logical? It was. He spread-eagled.

Concentrate . . . *uuuggghhh!*

Success.

Ah! His hangover had disappeared and again he was feeling chilly. Once more he was lying on a bed.

Bradley squirmed to his delicate feet and avoided looking in the mirror as, without benefit of bedcover, he approached the clothing. He peered around. Where should he start?

Hm-m-m. First this—how did they do it? Feet first or head first? Feet first seemed logical. A logical approach should accomplish wonders. It was the logic of an orderly mind. He stepped through the thing and began to pull. It was thick, heavy and rather tight. He pulled. Then wrestled with all his strength. Not so good. He sat down. Surely there must be a simpler way. Wiggling might do it. Therefore, he must try again and wiggle.

He pulled and wiggled. That al-most did it but not quite. Women must indeed be clever creatures. They probably did it every day. Well, practically.

Bradley was still struggling when Mr. Tramble's Bookkeepers took a look-see with a yank on the psychic-hook. Bradley bit his lip as the tearing hook forced a sobbing moan through his set teeth. His muscles jerked. The results must have been as surprising to the Bookkeepers as it was to Professor Bradley.

The painful stimulus and his agonized contortions were just what he needed. As the pain subsided, he noticed the contrivance was around his hips. It snuggled there. He tested it with curious fingers and it made a satisfying slapping noise. Yes, it was an interesting gadget.

Now—this? Easy.

This strange thing—or was it plural?—went on easily. Hm-m-m. One arm through here and the other through here. Now what? Evidently it was intended—Good heavens! It fastened in the back! Of all the absurd ideas! Did they take him for a contortionist? To blazes with it. He wouldn't wear it. He didn't need it anyhow. This long thing was better. Headfirst would do it. Correct.

NOW Bradley allowed himself a look in the mirror. Not bad. Not bad at all. Now for the skirt and blouse. The blouse was sort of frilly and thin. But that high-grade stuffing made a difference.

Hm-m-m. These slippers were a trifle tight. Yet a person can't have everything. It was like trying to walk on stilts. Now—now, he'd try to walk in the blame things.

Bradley inched across the floor like a tight-rope performer.

Who-oo-oops!

Professor Bradley got up painfully from the floor.

The finishing touches came next. He'd have to use lipstick and stuff. He sat down before the mirror. This should be no trouble at all. It ought to be easy. He had seen enough women do it in plenty of public places to know how. A light stroke would work wonders, back and forth.

Lop-sided.

Oh well, he'd put more on the other side. Bah, it slipped! Good heavens! It looked as if someone with an inaccurate knowledge of throat cutting had taken a swipe at him. Well, he'd rub it off and try again. Ah, that was better. Girls wore a lot of lipstick sometimes.

The hair came last on the program. It was lucky Trumble had furnished her with a nice hair-do before making delivery. Really, those jet black wavy tresses, smooth and shiny and silken under the electric lights were something to look at. Professor Bradley got quite a thrill admiring general design and effects. Then he moved over and ransacked the bundles again. Surely Miss Muir must have included one of those hair-nets, a snood? Ah, she had. He tried it on and studied the effect. Bradley had to admit he looked stunning. All that he now needed was a hat. Where was the hat?

Bradley poked a finger somewhere into a small feminine contrivance and held it aloft dangling on one finger. It was evidently a hat and it did a good job of dangling. But the designer must have used an Ouija board when he dreamed this one up. It had a queer fourth-dimensional shape and might have fitted a midget, but it was the right color for it matched the dress.

How in the name of logic did they tell front from back? Um-m-mmm. That didn't make much difference.

Bradley tensed the muscles of his tapering thighs and stood up. He leaned on the dresser for support. He'd have to practice walking in these slippers. There was sense in walking on your anklebone most of the time. Women walked around like this every day. So could he.

Painfully, Professor Bradley tottered almost to the bed before a doubt nagged him. Could he walk? He collapsed on the bed.

What was the difference? All he had to

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do was totter a short block and get his—or her—body checked into a hotel, change back and hurry to his classes. Then he could call up Tramble and be firm about matters. Yes, he'd call this thing off! It was bad enough to be risking his life essence to grab a body the Army would take—but to exchange it for a soft feminine chassis was too much!

He had to admit it was a rather well designed model though. The only trouble was it had turned out to be the wrong gender.

The telephone burped. Bradley grabbed it.

"Hello, yes," he said. "This is Professor Bradley's apartment." His delicate eyebrows arched, "Eh? What do you mean you're certainly surprised? Who am I? . . . But Dean Fritterton, I'm sorry I missed my first class. . . . Yes, this is Professor Bradley. . . Who's a hussy? Wait a minute—"

Bradley groaned and hung up. Now he was in for it! Dean Fritterton had called to find out why he wasn't at his morning class, and he'd answered the phone in a girl's voice, from his apartment—at this hour, when he should be at work. A "hussy" the Dean had called him. This demanded action, immediate and definite.

Bradley hobbled out of his apartment and rang for the elevator. A frizzle-haired maid stared at him curiously but Bradley ignored her. His mind was doing flip-flops. He'd check in at the nearest hotel and if that concentration stuff worked at long-range—

The elevator boy's mouth fell open, "Going down?"

Professor Bradley managed to keep his ankles from turning. Hadn't the lazy button-pusher ever seen a girl before? He adjusted the chow-mein hat and successfully balanced himself out of the elevator, out of the lobby, down the street and into a hotel half-a-block away before the virginal high-heel muscles in his legs trembled and decided they had had enough of the outrage. They called a strike. Bradley fell down.

A gentleman helped Bradley to his shapely feet in a manner that was perhaps a wee bit too chivalrous and not at all platonic. His method, so to speak, was quite foreign to the best principles of knight-errantry.

PROFESSOR BRADLEY'S masculine nervous system, at first relieved at finding itself vertical, took three short seconds to decide that it had been insulted and the consequently wild swing was unladylike and missed the gentleman. Since high heels don't provide proper foundations for launching round-house swings, the professor ended on the sidewalk again. He had a drafty feeling.

Bradley straightened out his skirt, yanked off his shoes and marched into the hotel and up to the goggle-eyed clerk.

"I want a room."

The clerk's eyelids managed to stretch enough to blink once over his distended eyes. He gulped.

"I beg your pardon, Miss. Are you all right?"

"Do I or don't I get a room?"

The clerk recovered and consulted his rack. "If you are asking for a theatrical rate, and have no baggage, we demand payment in advance."

Automatically, Professor Bradley reached for where his wallet should be. He jerked his hand away as if he had burned it. It was a startling sensation.

"Ah-h—I can get you the money later."

The clerk's mouth was an amazed O. Then he tightened his lips.

"Sorry, we're full up. No rooms."

Bradley had a flashing impulse to throw one of the shoes at the clerk. He restrained himself, for shoe coupons don't grow on trees, and put the shoes on. His feet ached. He reeled out of the lobby, blundered along the sidewalk and finally managed to stagger into his own apartment house lobby. He heard someone screaming.

"He's dead I tell you—he's dead!" said the voice. "Poor Professor Bradley! He's just sitting there in his chair so peaceful like. I went in to clean up after that girl came out and when I spoke to him, he didn't answer. He's dead—oo—ooh!"

The frizzle-haired maid had an excellent voice for hysterics and the manager was making soft clucking noises with his tongue as he fanned her with the classified telephone book.

Bradley edged past the switchboard. He heard the excited operator calling the police. On tip-toe, he had just started to sneak up the stairs when he heard the maid let out a squeal.

"There she is—that girl—going up the stairs. I saw her come out of the Professor's apartment."

Bradley ripped off the high-heels and sprinted up the steps. His stocking feet made thudding noises. Good heavens! This was getting serious. He slammed against his apartment door. It was locked. Hang it, the key was inside! He heard the elevator whining up from the first floor and started back down the steps. If he could go around to the rear and climb in the window everything would be all right.

The elevator door clanged open.

"Hey, you!" It was the elevator boy, and he was looking determined.

Professor Bradley raced for the main floor three steps at a time. In transit, he forgot others might be trying to cut him off and he

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went skidding into the stiff-shirted manager and the maid who were just starting up the stairs.

The tangle was quite involved. When Bradley finally succeeded in extricating himself from the struggling heap, he fought his skirt into a less alarming position and climbed to his feet.

"No fair," he mumbled to the fascinated manager, and picking up his slippers, he scooted out of the lobby.

A police squad-car was unloading at the curb as he went whizzing through the door.

"Hey!" said two policemen.

But Professor Bradley poured on the coal. His little feet twinkled and he kept going. Now what was he going to do? He couldn't just run and run. He had to get some money—get his own body—get to his classes—get Tramble to listen to reason—get organized about not saying those three words—and get away from the police. It seemed he had to do a phenomenal amount of getting! Yet the biggest "get" of all was—getting some ideas as to what and how. He twinkled around the corner. . .

BRADLEY needed a nickel. Dejected, he was leaning against the corner drugstore's window with the slippers under one arm. The pavement felt warm in the morning sun. Somehow, he had to get a nickel and call his apartment house. If he didn't prevent the police from removing his original body he might never be able to get it back. They might embalm it!

If he could scare up a nickel he could call and say he was Professor Bradley's private nurse, that the professor was subject to fainting spells, or something.

Hurrying pedestrians, still yawning from the ever unpleasant task of wrenching their unwilling bodies out of soft beds, passed the dishevelled girl with nothing more than sleepy glances. What if a girl did decide to carry her shoes these days? Maybe she lost her ration book.

Bradley tried to crack his female knuckles. They wouldn't crack. Minutes limped by while his mind clanked in fury with the problem of the nickel. His eyes narrowed as he saw a well dressed girl hiking toward him. She walked as if she were late, but he stopped her.

"I beg your pardon. This is unusual, but I've lost my purse and," he removed the chow-mein hat, "I'd be glad to sell you this for a dollar."

Suspiciously, the girl looked the hat over. Her eyes flickered only for an instant as she opened her purse and pulled out a dollar.

"Are you sure you aren't making a mistake," she said.

"I'm sure," replied Bradley. Taking the dollar, he hurried into the drugstore for some change.

He phoned.

"Hello. This is Professor Bradley's nurse speaking. . . What? . . . The coroner? . . To the morgue for an autopsy?" His voice cracked. "This is outrageous. He can't do that. Why, I'd object very much to an autopsy." He groaned. "Never mind."

He hung up. The receiver felt slippery in his moist fingers. Good grief! An autopsy! They had to cut bodies up into little chunks to do that, didn't they?

He raced through the door and flagged a yellow-cab. The breeze, buffeted by the swarming traffic, gave the short skirt an alarming air-conditioned principle. The tires revolved in a lordly manner toward the morgue at the conservative pace approved by the driver to be proper for the conservation of their rubber flesh while Bradley simmered in the slow boil of his own impatience.

CHAPTER VII

Girl Problem

BY THE time the taxi had pulled up before the squat graystone building, Bradley had completed half-a-dozen gory mental pictures of his body as various samples of mince-meat. Where did black-markets get their illegal meat anyhow?

"That's two-bits, girlie," grunted the driver as he opened the door. "Probably ain't nobody here during lunch hour. Want me to wait?"

Bradley hesitated, and then nodded as he stepped out. "Pay you after I pick up—something." This was going to be complicated.

He rang the bell and waited impatiently while the stoop-shouldered, gray-haired old man creaked open the metal door. Bradley pushed in.

"I'm a private nurse," he said. "Did they bring a Professor Bradley down here?"

"Yep, just got another one," replied the old man in a bored voice. "Wouldn't know the name off-hand. Coroner decided to knock off for lunch before he takes a whack at him."

"Then he didn't start yet!" breathed Bradley. He could hear echoes playing cops-and robbers with their voices in the distant dark corners. What a gloomy place it was.

"Nope, not yet," said the old man and started down the narrow corridor. "Suppose you wanna see him." He forced a black door open and continued in a tired voice. "Been

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here thirty-three years and it's always the same. Bring 'em in—go out to lunch—come back—and chop 'em open. Same old routine—nothing ever happens in this morgue. I get awful tired associatin' with stiffs all the time." He pointed to a sheet covered slab. "I guess that's the one you want."

Professor Bradley dragged the sheet away with a muscle-tensing expectancy. The shock of seeing his own pale face, a dish-water gray, grinning vacuously at the ceiling almost unnerved him.

"Dead like all the rest," mumbled the old man.

"No—no," Bradley stuttered. "He's j-just—somewhat—er—inert."

"I wish he wasn't." The old man's sigh was wistful. "I go to picture shows and see things always happening in morgues. Bodies disappear." His voice trailed off. Then plaintively he went on. "Nothing ever happens in this morgue! All of 'em is as dead as ice-box turkey. Thirty-three years it's gone on." He sighed.

Bradley's heart jumped and he had to swallow it. "You mean you wouldn't mind if a body—uh-h—didn't stay dead or something?"

"I wouldn't mind if they all got up and did a jitter-bug. At least it would be something to talk about. I got an undertaker friend who's always bragging me deaf with talk about a body he had once that tried to tell him it wasn't dead."

"Perhaps I could help you," said Bradley cautiously. "But what would the authorities say?"

"Pshaw—who cares?" The old man's eyes began to shine. "Is that body one of them zombies I hear about? Can you really do something? I got lots of bodies."

"I'll try," replied Professor Bradley in as casual a voice as he could manage. He lifted his lithe form up on an empty slab. The marble felt cold through the thin dress. He relaxed and closed his pretty eyes.

Concentrate—uuuggghhh!

Wow!

Dizzy, Bradley had no doubt that he was back in his own body, with a horrible hang-over. He popped up and squeezed his head between his hands. Ugh!

The old man shuffled over. "Well, I'll swan!" he said cheerfully. "She said she could do it and she did. Wait'll I tell this!" He cackled in glee.

"It's nothing at all," said Bradley and slid off the slab. "You don't mind if I take her with me, do you? She usually feels slightly unglued after managing these things." He hoisted the limp girl to his shoulder. The burden made his knee-joints feel as if they needed oiling.

"Not at all," chuckled the old man. "Tell her to come back any time." He led the way to the front door. "This is the most fun I've had since they brought in those Siamese twins to see what made them stick."

BREATHING heavily, Professor Bradley tottered down the steps with his shoulder-load of dangling female. He wrestled the flopping portions of the girl into the waiting taxi.

"Take us to Eight-Fourteen Sunnyside," he told the petrified driver, "and no conversation." He fumbled in his pockets. Empty. Darn it, they had emptied his pockets. He opened the purse for the ninety-five cents and waited until the cab jolted to a halt. He jangled the money into the driver's hand.

"Keep it," he said, and maneuvered the girl over his shoulder again.

The stiff-shirted manager, hands clasped behind him, was standing by the elevator as Bradley pressed the button with his free hand.

"Good afternoon, Professor Bradley." The manager smiled a pleasant smile. "I'm glad to see that you have recovered from your death." His jaw dropped. He clapped his hand against his forehead. "What am I saying?"

The elevator door clanged open as the manager recovered.

"See here, Bradley, you can't come in here carrying drunken girls," he sputtered.

"It's a hobby," returned Bradley hurriedly and stepped into the elevator.

"Let me into my apartment with a pass-key," he said to the startled elevator boy after the door had closed.

The elevator boy's trembling hand hit the key-hole on the fifth try. Bradley closed his apartment door with a firm push. He dumped the girl on the divan.

"Professor Hux Bradley, I presume?"

Bradley jumped. He turned around.

He was confronted by an animated ball of fat. It was another fat man. This one really was fat. He had rolls of it. His bald head and pinkish jowls shook as he waddled forward to shake hands.

"Hardy Blossom, is my name," he told the professor.

Bradley closed one eye. "Blossom? Didn't you once telephone me?"

"Yes, yes," said Blossom in that hearty tone of voice formerly used by the now extinct vacuum-cleaner salesman. "I called you as soon as I read your advertisement in yesterday's paper. Too bad you were busy at the time. Now we can get down to business—eh?"

"Good heavens!" exploded Bradley and sank into a chair. "Another one!"

"Eh?" said Blossom in alarm. "What did you say?"

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"You're too late," replied Bradley wearily.

Blossom's red cheeks turned purple. "You haven't closed any deal?"

"Yes, much to my regret."

"Not—" Blossom's voice was choked—"Life Psyche, Incorporated?"

Bradley nodded.

"Those scoundrels! Those cheap dirty conniving Darkonians!"

Blossom's jowls shook as he paced the room. His short jerky gestures pummeled the air.

"Underhanded! Unethical! Unfair! Professor Bradley—" He stopped and shook a fat finger under Bradley's nose. "If you had only waited! If you had only done business with me I'm sure you would have been better satisfied. What a bargain I would have given you if I had known that firm was after you. What was the deal?"

Bradley nodded toward the girl on the divan. "That—for my life essence. What are you so excited about? I'm the one that's in trouble."

"Trouble!" Blossom snorted as he walked over to inspect the girl. "You don't know what trouble is." He poked an experimental finger into the rumpled girl. "It's not bad—for a run of the mill model." He turned to Bradley with an air of exasperation. "If you had only waited to see me."

"I still don't—"

Blossom's voice was deliberate as he lowered himself heavily to a footstool.

"Professor Bradley, Life Psyche, Incorporated and myself are in the same field of business. Competitors you might say although I come from a star cluster near Betelgeuse; of course, as far as most humans are concerned, I'm in the tomato business. We sell very nice tomatoes if you should ever want a case. But—" he started to again shake his finger at Bradley— "Tramble has been building up a human essence surplus with his underhanded business tactics and it is beginning to hurt the market. Some of the other operators and myself are afraid he might get a monopoly on this planet if we don't do something about it. It's not right. Life forces from this planet are considered extremely desirable by the connoisseurs of my region of space. And besides, Earthian life forces are fairly stable and hold up well under the problems of storage and transportation. I do all exporting business, you see. Now tell me—what was the bargain?"

COMING NEXT ISSUE

THE WORLD THINKER

A Fantastic Novelet

By JACK VANCE

CHAPTER VIII

Demon Collector

QUICKLY Bradley explained. Blossom was fairly quiet until he came to the part about the three words he must not say.

"Ice on the hinges of Zandu!" swore Blossom. "Do you mean he used that old one on you? You should have had legal advice. That dictionary trick was voted out of existence when I was a mere youkarf. It's illegal. Where's the phone? I want to talk to Tramble."

Blossom took up the phone.

"Hello—get me Tramble. Never mind who . . . Hello—Tramble? It's me—Blossom. I've just talked to Professor Bradley. B-r-a-d-l-e-y. Bradley! Don't try to play innocent—he's one of your new accounts—what? Now listen, Tramble—What? . . . No, you listen to me. You didn't file any notification of a completed matrix . . . how do I know? Why, freeze you, I check with the Bureau every morning and that's more than you do. I know—I know—that's no excuse . . . I have trouble getting help myself—Yes, but just the same you were trying to get by on that old illegal dictionary trick and the client hasn't got a chance."

"Hey!" said Bradley.

Blossom frowned at Bradley to keep him quiet. "I could report you, Tramble," he continued. "Yes. What? Well."

Blossom's lower lip protruded as he paused.

"Yes, you can do me a favor and I'll forget it," he went on. "A sub-jobber of mine unloaded a shipment of essence on me that I'm afraid isn't very stable and won't keep. How about taking it off my hands? You've got a bigger staff and can turn it over quickly. Okay? And thanks. How are things otherwise? Um-m-m, you like it? Well I think I'll try an athletic type of human shape like yours next time. This fat man stuff is jolly, but it's unhandy sometimes. Okay—okay, Tramble. Give me a buzz."

Blossom hung up.

"Nice Darkonian, that Tramble, in a few ways. But a sharp business head, very sharp."

Blossom heaved himself to his feet and walked over to the girl. He removed a curiously shaped instrument from his pocket and fastened it like a locket around her throat.

"What are you doing?" asked Bradley nervously. "I've got to get rid of that body and go to my classes."

"A couple of things."

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The tip of Blossom's pink tongue peeped through his tightened lips. It wiggled from side to side with each slow movement of his fingers as he closed the clasp. "I'm getting even with Tramble and helping you at the same time."

He straightened up with an effort.

"I can't afford to let Tramble get your psyche too soon. It'll teach him a lesson and I've fixed it so you can hold out a little longer. You'd never be able to concentrate on not saying those words with an extra body underfoot all the time. Anyhow, I've got a life essence that's been giving my staff trouble and I'd like to get rid of it until Tramble collects from you. This extra body of yours will make a home for this troublesome psyche and give my staff a rest until you pay off."

Bradley wet his lips. "You sound as if I didn't have a chance."

"A chance?" Blossom clucked as if in pity. "You didn't think you did have a chance, did you? Anyhow, this body will now do lots of interesting things. I'm installing a vital life force that I got in a trade from Tramble when he took over her original body for an experiment. She's a trouble maker, I tell you. She's never satisfied—always wanting her own body back. Maybe this one will satisfy her."

He withdrew a piece of paper from his pocket and placed something in it. He twisted the paper into a taper and lighted it. A greasy smoke writhed upward and he held it under the girl's nose.

Bradley's middle section fluttered in and out like an accordion as he saw the girl's body quiver. Her eyes blinked open and she held up her hands to look at them. She cocked her head. She began an examination of her person in detail. Bradley flushed.

"Hey, quit it," he told her in a weak voice.

"They're always curious." Blossom shrugged and started for the door.

Bradley gasped.

"Good heavens! Tell her to do that in the next room!"

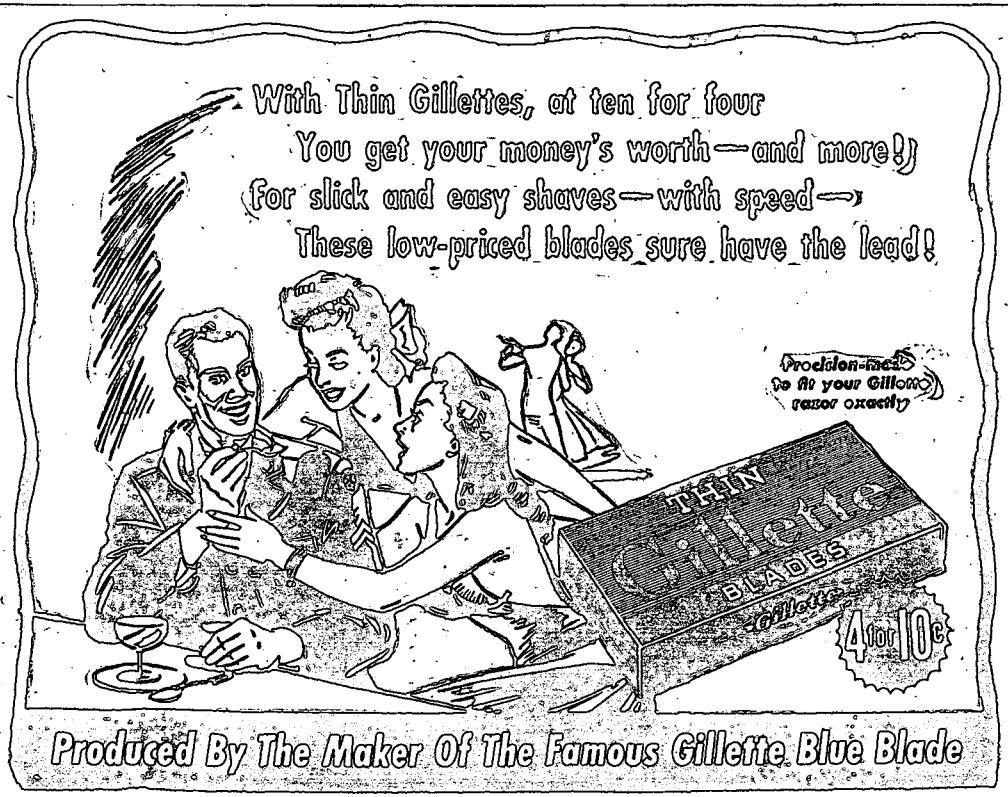
"She's your problem now," Blossom said lightly. "I must be going, Professor Bradley."

"Wait a minute," broke in the girl in a heated tone. "I want to talk to you, Blossom."

With a sinuous movement she jumped to her feet and started toward him. "What's happening to my real body, you over-stuffed ghoul?" She was angry. Bradley again noticed her chest. It stuck out.

"Good-by," said Blossom hurriedly and slammed the door.

[Turn Page]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BRADLEY saw the girl bite her full under-lip. Her furious breaths were deep and full, stretching and wrinkling the thin blouse in an interesting manner in accordance with the law of textile tension and its relationship to its underlying foundation. She looked like a satin-smooth jungle cat, sleek and nice, and the tailored skirt fitted where it touched. Bradley permitted the pressure of his held breath to escape in a low whistle. With some life in it that body looked different.

The girl swung around. Her black hair nestled against a rounded shoulder. Her eyes frisked Bradley.

"Hello," she said.

"Uh—hello."

"I want two things from you," she said. "A drink comes first."

"A drink," repeated Bradley and floundered into action. Some of the whisky splashed into the glass and he put it on the table beside her. He felt a bit dizzy as her finger wiggled at him to edge closer.

She pulled him down on the divan and expertly pinioned his arm behind him.

"Now give me a kiss," she murmured. Her breath smelled like a violet. She kissed him.

Bradley struggled up. His toes tingled.

The girl watched him over the edge of her glass while his capillaries adjusted themselves. He felt as if he had brushed his teeth with a power-driven lawn-mower—with soft blades. "Now look here," he said at last. "I don't even know your name."

"Judy." She had moist red lips.

"Judy—what?"

"Judy." She waved her hand. "Judy Bradley if you want to get married."

"Married?"

"Well, it's something to do," countered the girl. "And I have been up here for some time, I imagine. The neighbors might talk, you know."

"Good heavens! This is getting worse all the time."

Judy pouted. "If you saw my real body you wouldn't think things were getting so worse. I'll bet you'd want to marry me then. You should see me in a sweater. A sweater's better!"

"Sweater's better?"

"Sweater's better!" Judy nodded.

"Life Psyche, Incorporated took my body for an experiment of some sort, and since they didn't have any legal claim on my essence, I was forced to exist as an elemental." She wrinkled her nose. "It's hard to explain. Anyhow, I raised all plain and fancy trouble where they had me and nobody liked me."

"I think you're rather nice."

Judy extended a slim leg and sniffed. "This isn't the real me. I want my own body back before whoever's got it completely ruins it. It attracts men like flies! I know!" She sighed. "I got awfully bored floating around with no body. Where I was, it was a long time between kissing and drinking, I tell you." She put the drink down and her level eyes bored into him. She beckoned to him.

"Come here!"

Professor Bradley inched down on the edge of the divan. He intended to say something. But he didn't say it. He couldn't say it—with Judy kissing him again and holding both of his arms.

As operations proceeded, it became evident that Professor Bradley hadn't devoted much study to the art of kissing and breathing through his nose at the same time, because he started to turn red and purple as if he were strangling and Judy had to slow down to let him breathe.

"Now see here!" he managed to protest. "I've got to go to school."

Judy looked down at him calmly, but didn't relax the firm hold she had on him.

"You're going to school, all right, but it's going to be private instruction."

"My classes are waiting."

"I think you'll find my classes more interesting." Unperturbed, she settled down to the serious business of proving it.

IT WAS so interesting Bradley didn't struggle long, for he discovered he had nostrils.

"Now wait a minute," he said, drawing back. "I want to talk to you."

A catalyst is something that speeds up reactions and you still have it. Therefore, a kiss must be a form of catalyst. It speeds up reactions and you still got it. Anyhow, a man and a girl will sometimes discover that the finished product can be termed Love.

Bradley and Judy talked for three hours before they discovered they had a product.

Of course, the interval of time, during which mutual histories and wishes and dreams are swapped and exchanged, does wonders for stabilizing the finished product. They stabilized it.

Judy sighed. "I've read about love at first sight. It's nice."

"If only we get your real body back and I could get out of this silly bargain with Tramble, we could get married and so forth," Bradley said thoughtfully.

"Mostly so forth," breathed Judy.

"But what worries me is how to do it," continued Professor Bradley, undaunted. "Probably it wouldn't be legal to marry you in this body you have now."

Judy tilted her glass and tried to shake a small hunk of ice that persisted in sticking to the bottom down into her waiting mouth.

"I am yours to command." Her eyes had

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an impish expression. "What does the Master command?"

"That settles it." Bradley was firm. "Put your drink on that table and—"

Who-oo-osh!

A blinding flash of smoke and flame blasted across the living room like the puff of an old-time photographer's flash-pan.

Bradley jumped up. His eyes smarted and acrid fumes stung his nose. What was this? He twisted his shoulder in alarm as he felt the jerk of the psychic-hook, digging deep into his nerve centers. The pain, this time, was intense.

Agony shimmered over him in throbbing waves as the hook pulled tighter and tighter. The pressure was unrelenting. It did not subside. Bradley ground his teeth. This was too much!

"Professor Hux Bradley?"

A Darkonian, who was a stranger to Professor Bradley, had appeared in the room, near the taboret. He was a tired looking fellow and he was making an adjustment of his ring in a bored manner.

Wisps of greasy black smoke eddied around him and made him cough as he then checked something in a tattered notebook.

"As collecting agent for Life Psyche, Incorporated, I am hereby authorized to inform you that you are legally in debt to the aforementioned party for your essence. Said essence is to be collected by said party of the first part within one hour." He sneezed and started to fade away.

"Hey, what sort of a bargain is this?" shouted Bradley angrily. "I didn't say those three words agreed upon."

The agent flickered in a vague way.

"Oh, yes, you did," he replied in a tired voice. "The word ink is in 'drink'—hat is in 'that'—and able is in 'table'. That's all brother!"

With this he vanished as Bradley lunged at his nebulous shape and caught empty air.

Bradley groaned. His tortured stomach-muscles were screaming and pulling at him to double over and relieve some of the tension. The psychic-hook wasn't kidding this time. It hurt, with no let up in the tension.

Sweat, like from hidden springs, was popping out all over him.

Professor Bradley sagged to the floor and let his muscles pull his knees up under his chin. The agony was building in volume with each passing second as if an invisible but remorseless fishing line were pulling and dragging him in a predetermined direction. So, the pained thought came, Tramble had tricked him. If the psychic-hook got any worse he knew he would go begging to Tramble for relief.

So this was it!

HIS mind kept sliding off somewhere—retreating from itself. He felt Judy pouring a drink down his throat. Then she was tugging him into an upright position. Through a red haze, he saw that she was fighting to remain calm, but he could feel her fingers tremble as she smoothed his sweating forehead. He heard her talking down at him as if she were way, way off on a distant mountain peak.

"You've got to do something, Hux!" she kept crying. "They can't do this to us—now. Hux—can you hear me?"

Bradley tried to keep from fainting. She wanted him to do something, his thought tried to tell him despite its dizziness—and his world was a sinking thing of blackness and red flashes of pain which made him feel weak and nauseated. In vain, his mind tried to withdraw from beneath the descending oblivion of a slow whirlpool of blackness that spiraled down and down—stupefying his brain into nothingness.

There was a long blank lull in his thought. Then he became aware he was thinking again, ever so slowly. His mind felt like a sluggish pool of stale rain water—stagnant except for little drops of ideas that pattered hopelessly down one by one and didn't cause a ripple. What could he do? How much time had passed? The pain surged at him like an incoming tide.

"Hux—Hux, darling!" Her distant voice sounded as if she had been crying. "Can you hear me? You've only another half hour."

A half hour! He felt an angry strength sweep through him. He sat up despite the quivering of his muscles. He ought to go down there and blow the whole office to blazes.

Splash—went the puddle of his mind. The idea hit him so forcefully he almost forgot his pain. His brain settled. Of course! Why hadn't he thought of that before? And he should take Judy along too!

He stumbled to his feet and dragged Judy into the bedroom. His eyes kept blurring as he picked up the witch-doctor horn and limped over to the doorway. Maybe he would swing Tramble a tune—if he could work the doorway! The wrenching hook dragged at him as he made sure the wire with the Christmas-tree bulbs, Twembly had originally stuck there, was intact. He pursed his lips and tried to whistle.

"Hux," breathed Judy fearfully, "what are you doing?"

"Hush up, Judy!" Bradley said. "Don't interrupt me."

Bradley looked first at the girl, then at the door. Drops of perspiration oozed out on his forehead—drops of agony.

"If I can only do this, we're in the clear," he told her. "If I don't do it, we're goners!"

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Summoning all of his fortitude, he pursed his lips and began to whistle.

CHAPTER IX

Psychic Twister

AGAIN the pain of the hook returned but Bradley kept on whistling. Up and down the scale he went, trying to find the proper pitch and sequence. In one hand he was holding the witch-doctor horn, clutching it in frenzied desperation. If only he could strike on that strange melody, the correct series of vibrations he had heard Twembly use to start the Pick-up to working! He whistled until his lips were dry, but the doorway remained an ordinary doorway.

Bradley continued to sweat. The minutes scrambled by. He was probably too tense. It would be better to relax his mind and let his musical ear take charge of remembering the melody. His ear began searching its tonal memory.

His ear whistled—up and down, then down and up. The doorway flickered—for an instant. He almost had it. His ear pursed his lips in the proper pattern and he whistled. Again—and the writhing tentacles of inky blackness sprouted.

He took a firm grip on the horn.

"Come on," he said and dragged Judy with him as he stepped through. The blackness was heavy with a fluid solidity as of a sweeping current that moves—somewhere.

The sticky darkness snapped away. Hand in hand, they stood in the mahogany-walled waiting room. It was deserted. Bradley pulled Judy with him down the corridor toward the square green door. He didn't need directions. The hook was dragging him like a guiding compass.

He hesitated before the green door, looking at Judy. Her face was pale and her eyes wide with questioning.

"It may be a stupid idea," he gritted through pain clenched teeth, "but if Darkonians, or their equipment, are allergic to Voodoo music on a modern trumpet, I don't think it will do them any good at close range on a real witch-doctor horn. Stick close to me." He opened the door and almost strangled as the thick fog of the room beyond clogged his lungs. A low humming sound drummed at his ears. He heard Judy follow him, coughing, into the purplish-tinted fog that swirled around them.

Dimly, through the mist he could see banks and tiers of delicate glass tubes pulsing with inner blue lights.

Bradley's spine contracted into tight spirals of uncertainty as he sensed a something of squirming agony wash over him from somewhere. The agony wasn't his—he had his own. Something was being tortured here in this blue-purple grayness, but he wasn't sure how he knew. The something's agony seeped into him on all his sensory channels. It was an alien sensation that made him weaker than he should be. He realized he wasn't very brave—just desperate.

He put the horn to his lips as he felt Judy huddle up to him. His lips tensed. He began to play a soul-wrenching melody—and the stunning shock of the fearsome vitality in that ancient song as it sucked itself into life from his breath made him aware that the witch-doctor horn was now serving a purpose that had far more possibilities at this sort of thing than the most modern of trumpets. The tonal scale of this horn was not exactly correct. Most of the notes were off-key. The notes sounded alien, outre.

For a short second, the fog quivered. Then it writhed as a nebulous shiver vibrated through the twisting streamers. A bedlam of unintelligible thoughts lashed through Bradley's mind.

Judy huddled up close to him as vague shapes loomed up in the swirling mist and fell away. Bradley put his entire body into feeding life into the hideous melody that poured from the instrument.

"Stop that!"

It was a mental command so violent, so intense, that his mind screamed. Bradley's music faltered. His mind wrenched out an answering thought.

"Release me from this hook!"

Brutally, the psychic-hook jerked and twisted in a savage effort to pull him to his knees. Bradley strained against his agony. He poured a wild melody through the horn. He could see that the fog had withdrawn far enough to enclose Judy and himself in a small bubble of crystal clear air.

The damp fog kept its distance, roiling and seething as if it were alive and didn't like his music. All around him, faintly, he could see the crystal tubes glowing with ever greater and greater brilliance.

"Put—down—that—horn!"

The shattering impact of the thought almost short-circuited his brain. The bullet-like blow of each word reminded him dizzily of Tramble.

GRIMLY Bradley stiffened his legs against the weakness that was sapping his strength. His lips were tiring. His lungs felt lined with fire from the effort of his intense blowing. He tightened his mind and radiated his stubborn thought.

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"Destroy my matrix," he mentally commanded.

"Nonsense!" crashed the thought. "Stop that!"

Bradley jammed the mouthpiece harder against his tired lips. He played louder and higher.

The blue-purple-tinted fog was beginning to swirl faster now. It went around and around, as if in answer to some unguessable mandate. The bubble contracted.

A snake-like tentacle of mist writhed along the floor toward Judy. She grabbed Bradley's arm in alarm—and the gesture jerked the horn from his lips—choking the melody into silence.

On the instant, the heavy fog rolled forward. Vague things squished toward them as Bradley felt a vise-like mentality snap shut like a steel trap on his spinning brain. He tried to lift the witch-doctor horn to his mouth. His motions were heavy and drugged as if he had no power of command over them.

"Hux!" screamed Judy.

Something had dragged her down, fighting frantically, into the swirling mist.

Bradley collapsed into a sodden heap on the hard floor. Slime oozed up his leg. The touch was like the searing burn of molten steel. He forced his lips down to the mouthpiece and blew a desperate screeching melody through the instrument. High and shrill. He felt the slime retreat in haste as the melody drove the fog back like a battering-ram.

He struggled to his knees in the wavering bubble of clear air and saw that Judy was gone. The song, crying from the bell of the instrument, seemed to absorb some of the savage fury that choked him.

Judy was gone!

His eyes began to sting and burn. The ancient melody he played was a sighing pulse beat of rage and despair. And then Bradley heard several of the crystal tubes explode into shattering fragments. His bracelet felt hot.

"Bradley!" came the furious thought. "You're upsetting my entire staff!" The thought vibrated with an unholy anger. "Get that instrument out of here!"

In answer he played higher and higher until unexpectedly, he felt his bracelet burn his wrist and then loosen to slide to the floor.

Bradley tensed himself, and abruptly—the twisting hurt of the psychic-hook vanished.

"Get out!" thundered the command.

Bradley almost stopped playing in sheer relief.

"That girl—I want her safe," he flashed out the counter-thought. "And with her original body—you've been using it."

Enclosed in the bubble air, playing determinedly, he continued to advance through the sluggish fog. Once, twice, three times he heard more crystal tubes explode with tinkling noises.

The queer jumble of alien thoughts intensified as if an unknown conflict of wills raged in the shivering mist. Bradley knew he couldn't play much longer. The muscles of his lips were beginning to refuse to obey.

"So be it!" sneered the thought. "You can have her! Good riddance!"

The alien mind withdrew with a last convulsive flash of utter hate.

Bradley didn't dare stop playing until he saw an emaciated shape stagger toward him. His heart threshed a wild tattoo on his ribs as recognition crawled through him.

It was the tottering figure of a girl, wrinkled skin and bony arms that were in the act of adjusting Judy's clothes around its skinny body. The thin face was lifted imploringly to him. "Hux!" a cracked voice gasped.

Bradley's mind reeled. A satanic chuckling of obscene glee blasted his brain as he pulled the half-fainting girl through the door and slammed it behind them. He couldn't bring himself to look at her as he dragged her to the elevator and pressed the button for the ground floor. He clutched the witch-doctor horn in desperation as the elevator descended. His mind sickened within him. What had they done to her?

"Hux!" her voice kept repeating. "Oh, Hux!"

The night air smelled clean and fresh as he pulled her close to him on the sidewalk. Her head was buried in his shoulder. She was sobbing softly. "Wait, Hux—wait!"

A WAVE of pity smothered Bradley. He mustn't let her know how dreadful she looked. He mustn't let her see a mirror until he could get a doctor. He pressed her close to his still breathless chest. Maybe the proper rest and vitamins would help her. He began to talk, soothingly, into her ear.

"It's all right now, honey," he murmured. "I should have seen the way out sooner. They dreaded the same thing the old violin makers dreaded to find in the instruments they made—sympathetic vibrations. When a violin is cheaply or incorrectly made, a certain note or harmonic tone will set the entire instrument vibrating in sympathy, as it is called, and will amplify that one note so much louder than the rest that it is called a 'Wolf Howl!' When this is the case the entire instrument is worthless and must be destroyed."

"Oh, Hux," she murmured. "Don't go away. Wait!"

"They won't hurt you now, honey," he said. "Just as the proper series of notes

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from the human voice can shatter a vase, so did something in that combination of witch-doctor horn and ancient witch-doctor melody uncover a hidden or forgotten weakness in those Darkonians. Everything in life, just as in music, is made up of some sort of vibration, and since all those tubes were sensitive to vibrations and intended to amplify vibrations, something went wrong for Them. Those old witch doctors thought they were driving evil spirits out of the sick with their weird music. They did accomplish strange things, but they didn't know why or how."

Professor Bradley noticed an odd change was occurring. Judy's body seemed to be rippling and swelling. A vibrating quiver was shaking her from head to foot! An unexpected thought came to him. Judy was like a flower. This was how a rose would feel if he held a young bud—unfolding—in his hand. Her body was warmer—and softer. He looked down. He saw something intriguing.

He felt the girl push him away. He stepped back. It wasn't Judy exactly. Unfamiliar. But she had the impish tilt of Judy's head and that same sly look when she spoke.

"See Judy, now?"

She lifted soft round arms over her head. She turned slowly on her heels like a tantalizing thing out of one of his special secret dreams. Her laughter was throaty like only Judy's laughter was throaty. She wrinkled her nose. "What did I tell you?" she murmured. "You like?"

"Good heavens!" said Bradley.

Fascinated, his gaze traveled up and down a line perpendicular to the sidewalk while his right hand waved down a passing taxi with a gesture that was entirely reflexive.

"Good heavens!" he said again as Judy wiggled into the taxi. "We're going to buy a sweater."

"And a marriage license—quick!" she directed the driver.

Bradley looked at her in a daze. "You looked so—er—unexpanded!"

"They didn't experiment with my body after all," explained Judy cheerfully. "They sort of had it in storage and when I got me back in where I belonged, I suppose it was like putting the juice back in a dried apple." Her left eye winked. "It makes a difference."

"It makes me—" started Bradley and then yelled: "Look out!"

He caught a fleeting glimpse of a delivery truck swerving directly in front of their speeding cab. Frantic, the driver jammed on the brakes. Bradley had a startled look at the sign on the skidding truck, BLOSSOM TOMATOES, before there was a mind-splitting crash and everything dissolved into nothingness. . .

When the ambulance arrived, the interne saw a fat man evidently trying to revive two unconscious figures in the back seat of the wrecked cab by the queer method of burning pieces of twisted paper under their noses. He pushed the fat man away and practiced what he had been learning in medical school.

Stretchers groaned, sirens screamed, hospital doors banged and the interne checked in his wares to the chief surgeon before he went out on another call.

LATER, the interne approached the surgeon in charge.

"What about that young couple who were in that taxi that got smashed by the tomato-truck?" he asked.

"They're okay. Shaken up a bit. They seem a trifle confused about what's happened during the last few days. It's probably partial amnesia from shock, but not serious. They're young and in love—they'll get over it. But you know," he mused, "they both have a strange fixation—the young fellow especially."

"Strange?"

"They both say if they don't get a marriage license quick—so they can go on with their classes—they're liable to go crazy. The fellow wants to buy a sweater immediately. A white one."

"He must be crazy."

Suddenly, the surgeon chuckled. "Perhaps he's not crazy. You'd probably understand if you were—

He broke off and looked at the interne.

"Weren't you in the X-ray lab when the girl was brought in?"

"No."

"He's not crazy."

"Oh," murmured the interne enviously.

Scientist Dirk Braddick pits himself against solar migrants that threaten the existence of Earth in

THINGS PASS BY

An Astonishing Complete Novel

By MURRAY LEINSTER

NEXT ISSUE

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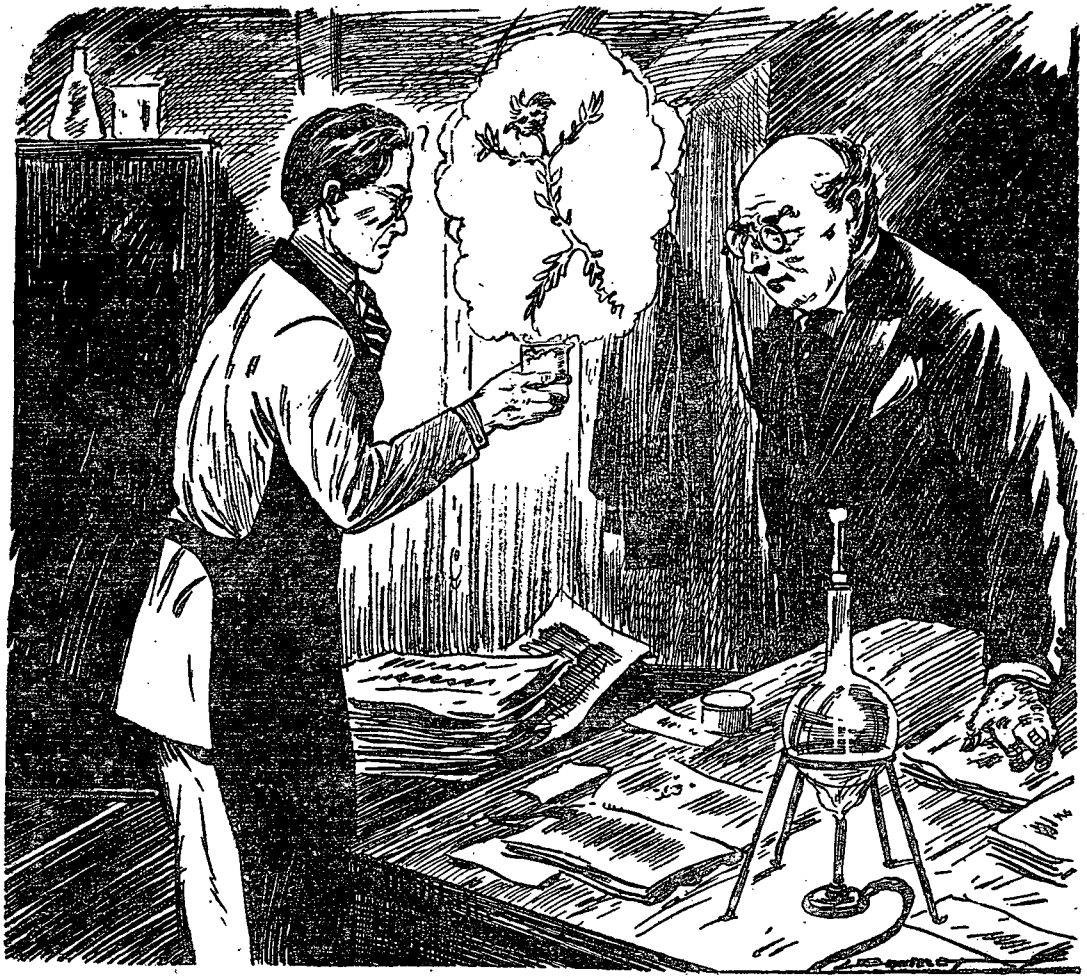

Gratefully Jefferson Smith tossed down the bubbling drink Mr. Granville had given him

THE PLANT MAN

By ARTHUR G. STANGLAND

It was all a matter of Chlorophyll—and it changed Jefferson Smith into the most remarkable being in all civilization!

JEFFERSON SMITH at thirty-two had never entirely overcome his boyhood fear of a school principal, even though he now was an instructor in general science. He tried to get past the principal's office door without being noticed.

"Mr. Smith!" boomed a voice which swelled out of the office and echoed down the hall.

Jefferson halted dutifully. He was well aware that the eight-thirty bell had rung long before he entered the building. But no sign of that knowledge appeared on the mild, pale face he poked in the door.

"Yes, Mr. Pettingill?" he answered. His slate blue eyes appeared larger than they really were through his thick lens-glasses.

A short, fat man with black, fat eyes sat tilted back, his feet dangling in the air. Without moving his head and two chins, he cast

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his eyes significantly up at the wall clock.

"This is the third time this week you've been late," he said. "Ten minutes is ten minutes. Three times that is half an hour and in thirty-six weeks that is eighteen hours. It's refined robbery—you realize that, Mr. Smith?"

Jefferson Smith adjusted his glasses unnecessarily and displayed a weak smile. "I'm sorry, Mr. Pettingill, but I had to finish fractioning off chlorophyll 'a' at home."

"Always dabbling around with chlorophyll," the principal shouted. "You should be giving more time and interest to the school—like the benefit carnival we gave last night. We took in five hundred dollars toward new gym equipment. You were conspicuously absent."

"But, Mr. Pettingill, analyzing chlorophyll is an important experiment," Jefferson Smith said, warming to his pet subject. "It's a colloidal mixture of proteins and other substances with four pigments, chlorophyll 'a', chlorophyll 'b'—"

Mr. Pettingill was a man who always kept safely inshore, and barked at anybody who tried to take him beyond his depth. Colloids, chlorophyll "a", chloro—Mr. Pettingill's substantial feet hit the floor.

"For heaven's sake, Smith, go to your classes!" he spluttered, turning to his desk.

Glad to make his exit, Jefferson hurried down the hall to the general science lecture room. As he entered, a riffle of tittering whispers swept over the class. Intently serious, Jefferson sat down at his desk and busily opened and closed three drawers before he found McBride and Lawton's "General Science."

IN THE front row of the class a small freckled freshman with an upturned nose turned to his neighbor.

"Watch this," he whispered. Then he addressed the teacher.

"Mr. Smith?"

Jefferson looked up. "Yes, Max?"

"Well," Max began hesitantly, "I—I was reading an article on sunlight and plants, and it said something about 'photosynsis'."

"Photosynthesis," Jefferson corrected him. He stared at Max with an awakening interest.

"Yeah," Max agreed, "what is that?"

"Photosynthesis is the process of turning sunlight into sugars and chlorophyll. Chlorophyll is the green coloring matter in plants." Forgetful of time and place, Jefferson took a breath and launched into a monologue marathon. "There is a surprising similarity between blood and chlorophyll. The only difference being that the center atom of chlorophyll contains magnesium while the blood atom contains iron. Crude chlorophyll is dissolved in an unknown substance that is either a wax or a resin, and so. . . ."

For the rest of the period Jefferson droned on while the class sat back and relaxed in the lulling sound of his monotonous voice. When the five minute warning bell rang, he stopped in the middle of a sentence. A sickening wave of guilt whirled through him.

"We haven't spent much time on the lesson for today," he said apologetically. "Well, I hope you all have a pleasant weekend."

At the end of the day, Jefferson Smith headed home with the feeling of a free man—that is, free for the week end. Now he could devote all his time to chlorophyll, and finish his fractioning process of the pigments.

Instead of going into the Granvilles' house where he roomed and boarded, he walked across the yard to the little shed on the back of their lot which he used as his laboratory.

Although the inside of it contained a realm of romantic adventure to Jefferson Smith, another person might have been forced to strain his imagination in finding the romance. The place was a catch-all, a cubby where almost anyone else would have used to stuff odds and ends into and then slam the door to keep them in. Smith had constructed three benches. On two of them rested the accumulation of years which Smith never could quite steel himself to destroy. The third was piled with beakers, test tubes, flasks, rubber stoppered bottles, stray sheets of note paper and a bottle of bromo seltzer for frequent headaches.

As Smith's experiments had expanded, he had taken from the two benches and piled on the third, so that he was continually in the midst of an upheaval. Yet by some marvelous feat of memory he knew exactly where to find everything.

Although another would be totally defeated by the conglomeration, Jefferson Smith now stood in the midst of this chaos, and magically started where he'd left off in the morning. He lighted a Bunsen burner under a fat bellied retort containing a greenish black liquid. Then while it heated, he got into a black rubber apron, rolled up his sleeves, and went to work.

The hours passed unnoticed as he jotted down notes and measured out fluids. The

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Bunsen burner hissed steadily in the background while an occasional sharp click of glass on glass broke the monotonous sound.

When Jefferson again became conscious of time and place, it was seven o'clock in the morning. Not until then did he realize that a combination of eye-strain and an olfactory sensitiveness to chemicals had brewed a buzz-saw headache.

At this moment Mr. Granville, who lived with Smith, stepped in to announce that breakface was on the table. He approached the work bench, and peered over his pince-nez into a beaker of orange liquid.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Carotin," Jefferson explained, trying to forget his headache. "It's the yellow pigment that colors carrots."

"The devil you say." Mr. Granville peered at the liquid and jiggled his jowls. Next he looked over the littered benches. "Tell the truth, it's the first time I've been out here. What is it you're doing?"

JEFFERSON rubbed his aching forehead. "I'm trying to find out what chlorophyll really is."

"Oh," Mr. Granville said vaguely. Then for the first time he noticed Jefferson's blood shot eyes and the pain in his pale face. "Say, have you got one of your headaches?"

"Yes, I guess working all night was too much for me."

Mr. Granville interrupted him solicitously. "Don't move, my boy. I see you have bromo here. I'll fix you up a dose."

Jefferson murmured his thanks, and took off his glasses to rub his eyes. Thus he did not see Mr. Granville grab the first beaker handy, Mr. Granville, who badly needed a change of glasses but was too proud to admit it. In the bottom of the beaker lay a coating of light green crystals and an amber colored wax that dissolved in the fizzing bromo. Gratefully Jefferson tossed the frothing drink down and shuddered.

"There, that ought to fix your headache," said Mr. Granville.

"I always get headaches from these vapors," Jefferson explained.

Mr. Granville went through the door. "Better freshen up, my boy and come have breakfast.

Jefferson was going to say, "All right," but never got it said because he couldn't draw the breath to say it. A sharp pain, as of stifling, shot through his chest and spread down his arms. It came as such a surprise that he stood rigid in the middle of the floor. Then a chill seized him and he shuddered violently.

He staggered to a stool and sat down, gasping for breath. All through his body stirred a strange sensation, an agitation in his very blood stream. With each pump of his heart the agitation increased. For long minutes he sat while his stomach turned over slowly like barbecuing meat.

Then as he lifted his hand, he saw for the first time it was tinted a light green. The color began at the finger tips and was spreading up the arms. In fact the green was deepening as he stared at it. He'd been poisoned! Mr. Granville had got hold of a tainted container.

Smith stepped over to the bench and out of the litter there, picked up the beaker he'd used. In the bottom were undissolved crystals—crystals of chlorophyll "b." A cold shock swept over him. In that beaker besides chlorophyll "b" had been the dregs of another degradation product—aetioporphyrin, a chlorophyll product identical with human blood pigment, haeman. Jefferson set the beaker down with a trembling hand, and rested against the bench.

Though one part of his brain swirled in chaos, another part sternly scientific tackled the problem of bio-chemical reaction in his body. The violent writhing of his stomach was its involuntary effort to empty itself of the powerful crystals of chlorophyll "b." But once in his digestive tract, the dissolved crystals were swiftly escaping into his blood stream like fifth columnists, come to do their nefarious work. Then his blood was transforming its basic constituent haeman, in company of an unknown catalyst or enzyme, into aetioporphyrin and thence into chlorophyll. The reaction would go on until his entire blood stream was green!

A thought hit him with stunning force. Good heavens—this green hue to his skin meant the respiration cycle was reversed. It meant he was now breathing in carbon dioxide and exhaling oxygen!

A million questions surged up out of his subconscious mind. How would he eat? Would his skin turn into bark? Would he take root somewhere like a stalk of wheat or oats?

His lungs were beginning to labor, as if a band were closing around them. That would mean they were striving for more nitrogen. There was another disturbing phenomenon too. The room was getting warmer, which

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meant that his blood—er—chlorophyll stream—was dropping to its normal temperature. Far below blood heat.

So absorbed had Jefferson Smith become in his plight, that he never noticed the door open. It was Grace Granville, his landlord's daughter—blonde, with a perky, freckled nose. She had always been possessively interested in him. "Jefferson, we're waiting for you."

She stopped and stared across the room at him. "My gosh, you're as green as lettuce!"

CONFRONTED by the necessity of explaining away his appearance, Smith fumbled for words that would not come.

"Yes—yes, I guess I am." He lifted his right hand in a vague gesture.

The girl skirted the bench. "Oh, goodness, you must be poisoned," she cried, like a mother fretting over a child filled with green apples. She took his hand—and then dropped it as if it had been a corpse's. Astonishment and fear filled her eyes.

"You're ice cold."

"Grace, listen. Please!"

She ignored him and stepped to the door. "Father!"

Mr. Granville came immediately, pinching his pince-nez on his ample nose. The sight of Jefferson's green face and hands stopped him at the door.

"Bless my soul," he breathed, swallowing in consternation. "What's happened to you?"

"We've got to get him in bed right away and call Dr. Anderson," Grace decided.

"But I don't want to go to bed," Jefferson Smith objected. Anywhere but in bed with a lot of people hovering over him.

"Tut, tut," Mr. Granville silenced him. "That's just where you're going."

Without arguing the point any more, Smith was forced toward the main house. You didn't argue with the Granvilles—you agreed with them. Behind, he heard them whispering hurriedly, and it sent a flurry of terrifying chagrin through him. Maybe they suspected already that he was a walking plant—a hybrid.

In his room Jefferson sat down on the edge of his bed. He tried to take a big breath for a deep, heart-felt sigh, but he was even denied that satisfaction. A pain like pleurisy constricted his lungs, so that he took short sharp breaths.

His eyes wandered aimlessly up to his greenish hands resting in his lap. Inside there under his skin chlorophyll was surging through his veins instead of blood. It made him think of stagnant ponds, green slime, cold frogs, floating things on the border line between plant and animal life!

He blinked to shut out those pictures. Time enough later if the instinct in chlorophyll drove him to those places. He raised his head, staring straight at the wall. What he saw then lifted the hair on his neck.

Before him floated an image that could only come from a ghostly movie thriller—large green eyes with black pupils in a pale green face. The head moved, and then he realized it was his in the wall mirror. No wonder he frightened the Granvilles!

The pain in his chest got worse as he sat there, and accompanying it was a desire to taste something strange and new. It was illusive, difficult to place, like food requiring a new condiment to bring out the best flavor. The sensation grew on him like a thirst, commanding him to search for it. Part of him recoiled in fear, for what might not the chlorophyll in his body demand? Yet it was impossible to sit still in the exquisite tortures of a strange new hunger.

He was on his feet headed for the door when it opened. In stepped the Granvilles and a man with a carefully cropped moustache and a way of holding his head high as if it might roll off his shoulders.

"Jefferson, this is Dr. Anderson," Grace Granville said.

Jefferson Smith stood still. "But I don't need a doctor," he protested.

One glance at the green colored instructor was enough to startle the doctor out of his professional dignity.

"Good grief!" he gasped, then hurried into the room.

Before he knew it, Smith was on the bed, a thermometer in his mouth. The special doctor's hands were very warm, where he held him by the wrist counting his pulse. A puzzled frown formed on the doctor's brow as the seconds ticked by. Then he removed the thermometer and squinted at it.

His brows shot up. "Incredible!" he muttered. "A temperature of seventy-two degrees!"

Flabbergasted and a little peeved that Jefferson Smith was still alive and thus defying all laws of physiology, the doctor pricked one of Smith's ear lobes with a needle. As the little drop of green fluid expanded, the doctor stared at it fascinated.

At last he found his voice. "My dear man, just what have you been doing to get into

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this condition?" he asked, cocking his head on one side.

Jefferson stared back at him, fighting down the pain in his chest.

"I don't know."

Mr. Granville adjusted his pince-nez and swallowed, making his jowls jiggle. "The last thing he put into his stomach was a bromo-seltzer," he offered. "I gave it to him myself."

"A bromo-seltzer, hm." Dr. Anderson considered a moment. "Let me see the glass you used."

While Mr. Granville was gone, the doctor addressed Jefferson severely. "Young man," he began, "you are a biological phenomenon. Your heart beat is under normal and your temperature is far below blood heat. How you continue to stay alive is beyond me."

Mr. Granville came in with the beaker he had used. Jefferson watched him give it to the doctor. Somewhere down inside of him the strange appetite was gnawing and gnawing. It was getting too powerful for him to deny any longer. He had to satisfy it, just as a drowning man needs air.

Now was the time, while Dr. Anderson was engrossed in the beaker. He slipped off the bed and boldly walked toward the door, taking them all by surprise. Before they could seize him, he was out in the hall and hurrying down the steps. He was free! Free to satisfy that strange, exquisite longing. Through the house and outside into the damp moist air he hastened.

FOR a moment he stood irresolute. What now? Then the puzzle was solved for him. Rising to his sensitive nostrils was the smell of damp cool soil in the garden.

That was what he wanted—fresh turned earth!

He got down on his knees and scooped up a handful. Never had anything tasted so luscious, so completely satisfying. It had the tang of salt, the savory taste of bread crust when one is very hungry. Even as he ate it, he knew the reason for the appetite. His chlorophyll stream was nitrogen-hungry.

But Jefferson's behavior did not go unnoticed. Even as the Granvilles and Dr. Anderson came out on the porch, a young boy stopped on the street and stared. Then he yelled to three others playing across the way.

"Hey, fellers, come and lookit the green man!"

A passing car stopped in the middle of the street. Two pedestrians halted and crossed the pavement to stare at Smith. Behind Smith, the Granvilles were hurrying down the steps.

"Jefferson, what in the world are you doing?"

He looked at the gathering crowd, the amused curiosity on faces waiting to see what would happen. If the Granvilles and the doctor laid hands on him, there would be a show all right. The whole thing was nauseating, revolting. Like some new discovery, he was being gawked at by the world.

He got up, whirled away from snatching hands, and broke into a run around the house. Passing the shack, he crossed the back lots to another street.

Here there were few people in sight and he sprinted as fast as he could go. At the end of two blocks he was gasping for air—well, nitrogen. He had to have more. The nearest earth in sight was a lawn.

Cautiously he dug into the grass and down to the soft moist dirt. He was lifting it to his mouth, when the front door of the house opened, and a woman came out.

"Hey, what're you doing there?" she yelled.

Jefferson scooped up a handful and ran staggering around the corner. For a moment he stopped and gulped a mouthful. The strange, new taste of earth eased the pain in his lungs and body. Life-giving nitrogen was entering his blood—no, his chlorophyll, Jefferson corrected himself sorrowfully. He was a horrible monstrosity, a hybrid, a link between animal and plant world.

He took a road out into the country, ignoring the people who stopped to stare after him. On his right he saw a stagnant ditch. He wandered toward it, driven by a compulsion inherent in the molecular structure of his chlorophyll stream. He sat down on the bank and gazed at the green slime coating the edges. Algae—half-animate, half-plant life.

Now that the excitement of escape was over and his mind was quiescent, his stream of consciousness slowed down alarmingly. It moved aimlessly but of great depth. On the surface of those depths Jefferson drifted, vaguely conscious of strange subsurface currents drawing him along to who-knows-what destiny. The logical laws of nature had been violated. What would she do with the hybrid?

Shadows began to lengthen, but Jefferson still sat, content with the company of floating algae and the little green frogs that occasionally disturbed it.

His reactions were slowing down along

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with other functions, so it can't be said he was startled by the sudden appearance of Grace Granville.

"Jefferson!" she exclaimed in relief. "What a time I've had tracing you—asking people if they'd seen a green man." She wrinkled up her pert nose at the stagnant ditch. "What ever possessed you to come out here?"

"Hello, Grace." He said it slowly, almost regretfully, for he was vaguely conscious of the abyss already separating her as a human being, and him as a—a walking alga.

She leaned over to take him by the arm. "You can't stay out here. Come on—I'll drive you home. You've got to see Dr. Anderson."

But he sat like a kid who has run away, and is faced by the pursuing authority of home, yet stubbornly refuses to budge. He cast sorrowing eyes up to her.

"You don't realize—I can't go home—ever."

"Nonsense. Why?"

"You wouldn't understand what's happened to me. My blood has turned into chlorophyll. I'm not a human being any more. I'm—I'm a walking plant!" He told her briefly what had happened.

WITH the faith of the ages, Grace Granville took that in stride. Hers not to reason or solve, hers only to believe in.

"Jefferson, you are growing lazy," she said looking him straight in the eye with the uncomfortable directness of a woman rooting out guilt in her man. "You can't just sit here and make no effort to help yourself. You got yourself into this mess, now you can get yourself out of it. Come on. We're going back to your laboratory."

Like a petunia out in the hot sun, Jefferson wilted under her blazing eyes. He got up and followed her to the car.

Back in town it was twilight, but the furor caused by his strange transformation had not subsided. Jefferson was the first to catch sight of the sound newsreel truck outside the Granville home. A broadcasting truck was parked beyond it, and crowds of people filled the street.

Frightened to death, Jefferson Smith slumped in his seat.

"Oh, my goodness," he groaned. "I can't go in there. Drive on—don't stop!" As they rolled on he looked at her vaguely. "Just drop me off on a country road. I'll be happier out there."

Grace Granville's brows ridged in furious momentary thought. They they lifted in triumph.

"I know. You're going to your school laboratory." The car picked up speed, heading up the hill to the highschool.

It was almost dark now as they stopped before the black windowed school. Silently they walked up to a side entrance.

"How are we going to get in if the door is locked?" asked the unimaginative Jefferson Smith.

Grace turned to him impatiently, "Oh, Jefferson—haven't you ever broken a window?"

But strangely enough, the door wasn't locked. And stranger still was the mumble of voices they heard from Mr. Pettingill's office as they entered.

Jefferson and Grace started for the office. A beam of light gleamed through the doorway of the principal's office and they heard someone speaking in rough tones.

"Awright, Pettingill, get that safe door open quick," it said. "You've stalled long enough."

Jefferson and Grace stopped. They heard Pettingill's frightened voice protesting.

"But I tell you we—we always have trouble opening this—this safe door."

Another voice, higher pitched than the first one, spoke up now.

"Come on, Puffy Pants, we know you got five hundred from the benefit in there. You're stallin'!"

Quietly Jefferson Smith retraced his steps, followed by Grace. At the door he paused.

"You go get the police," he told her.

"What you going to do?" she asked, all her bravery of the evening gone.

"You'll see," was all he answered.

He disappeared downstairs to the chemistry lab, and returned in a few moments, carrying a flask of liquid in one hand and a glass funnel in the other. Stealthily he climbed the stairs to the main floor.

"You be careful, Jefferson," Grace whispered.

At the office door Jefferson raised the flask shoulder high, then tossed it into the room.

"Run, Grace—get the police!"

There was a shattering tinkle of broken glass at the feet of the two strange men. Pettingill was squatted before them, twirling the safe dials in the beams of a flashlight.

One of the men let out a yell.

"Ow! My legs are burning!" He lifted his hand and a flashing roar came from the weapon in his hand.

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Jefferson Smith's right shoulder felt as if a sledge had struck it.

But he had the satisfaction of hearing the men gagging and gasping for breath, as the fumes from the liquid rose. One of them staggered to a window struggling to get it open.

Jefferson Smith found Pettingill on the floor. He placed the glass funnel over Pettingill's nose and started blowing the pure oxygen into it that he exhaled. His own eyes were smarting and running tears. Miraculously, Pettingill revived under the heavy shot of oxygen.

Then Jefferson guided Pettingill to the door. "What on earth was that stuff in the bottle, Jefferson?" asked the principal.

"Bromine," said Jefferson. "Tear gas is made from it."

That was all Jefferson could say, because he keeled over out on the main floor.

When he came to, Jefferson Smith found himself in a hospital cot. He started to raise his right arm, and then stopped to stare at it. It was pink—a beautiful pink, like any normal human arm!

Grace Granville stood at the foot of the bed, smiling at him.

"What's happened to me?" he asked. "What happened to the chlorophyll?"

"You bled so much from your shoulder they had to give you several transfusions of blood," she explained. "Dr. Anderson says the strange transformation of your blood into chlorophyll was only temporary, that it would have swung back again to normal blood."

"Oh, I guess that explains it."

The door opened, and a head with several chins popped in. Mr. Pettingill. A very subdued Mr. Pettingill.

"Hello, Jefferson," he said solicitously. "I'm so glad you're looking—ahem—better, more human again." He sucked nervously at his teeth. Then he went on as if in mortal pain. "About last night, er, you saved the school benefit funds and I want to—er—express my gratitude."

Grace Granville broke in. "Yes, he saved the school funds—when you should have transferred them to the bank before closing time."

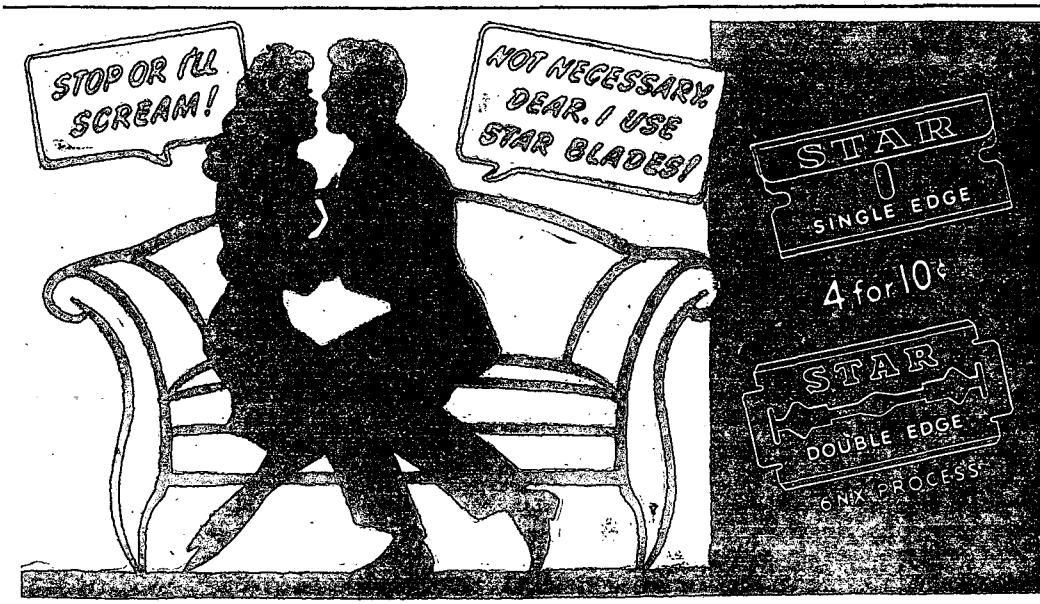
Pettingill was apologetic. "Just an oversight on my part. You see, I was so—busy I didn't get time to do it."

But Grace was determined to bring him to bay. "And what about that statement you made in the afternoon paper yesterday that Jefferson was a crack pot experimenter and that you'd see he was fired?"

Pettingill started backing out of the door. "Miss Granville, we all make mistakes and we are only too glad to acknowledge that Jefferson is a hero." The door closed in haste.

Jefferson lay staring a long minute at the door. "What are you thinking, Jefferson?" Grace asked.

Jefferson Smith turned mild eyes on her. "I was thinking that if Mr. Pettingill had chlorophyll for blood he'd turn into poison ivy."



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"There—look at Aarn Logan!" Reggie told Elise

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VENUS SKY-TRAP

By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

With their rocket-ship caught in a water spout and a girl's life at stake, Reg Mason and Pirate Aarn take a last slim chance to balk a villain!

CHAPTER I

Assignment On Venus

IN SPITE of the repulse, the girl in the green dress continued her pleas.

"But Reggie!" she begged. "Why can't you take me with you? You're bound for the self-same place I want to go, the water-spout region, where Aarn Logan is hiding out. I demand an answer!"

Elise Maynard hung onto Lieutenant Reggie Mason's blue and gray uniformed arm, her high-heeled slippers beating a rapid tattoo on the pavement of Venus City's main boulevard, as she tried to keep up with his long stride. Around them was the traffic of the busy downtown district, above them, at five hundred feet, loomed the curving super-steel enforced glass dome which protected Venus city from the noxious vapors in the jungle without.

"It's just plain silly," she panted almost tearfully. "Here I am, one of the smartest woman geologists in the Smithsonian, and one of the prettiest, too, I'll bet, and you've

A COMPLETE INTERPLANETARY NOVELET

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got a ship, and I haven't because I can't get a grant until next week—and—and you won't invite me. I don't even make any impression on you! Well, I know why, all right. It's your darned old VCPC regulations."

Lieutenant Reggie Mason rolled gray eyes heavenward as if he were praying for strength. Then he stopped, swung about and bent his head until the peak of his officer's cap was touching the sleekly coiffed golden brown hair which was showing beneath Elise's flowery bonnet. He waved his finger under her defiantly uptilted nose.

"When you begin knocking the Venus Control Police Corps, my dear young lady, that's when you step on my bunions."

"And that," she flared, "is what I wanted to do!"

"When you realize," continued Reggie, "that the VCPC built its whole reputation on the strength of its discipline, when you realize that Venus itself would be overrun with gangsters—pirates like Aarn Logan, maybe—when you realize that, you'll realize that I haven't any right to ask you along on a dangerous pirate-hunting expedition. This is a one-man job—no women, see? But—" the stern expression dropped from Reggie Mason's young, tolerant face and he smiled a little "—but I'll tell you what I'll do."

"Oh!" she gasped, her eyelids fluttering in mock faintness. "Oh, no! Don't tell me the tyrant is going to unbend."

Reggie studied her, a trace of red rising from his tight collar.

"Sometimes I wander how I ever got along with you, upstart," he snapped. "Here's what I was going to suggest. I'm on my way to see my superior, Captain Hudson. You come on with me and we'll put the problem up to him."

Her tearful, angry face underwent a startling transformation. Her eyes grew wide.

"Oh, Reggie!" she cried. "Captain Hudson? Captain Phil Hudson? Why—why, I know him."

REG MASON'S face was a study. No one knew better than he that GHQ would never consent to civilian business being conducted along with VCPC duty. That was why he had suddenly decided to let Hudson quash Elise's hopes. Heaven knows that Elise had plagued him enough since her arrival on the Earth-Venus transit yesterday. But her knowing Captain Phil Hudson put another aspect on the situation—and not the one she supposed.

"Well, that makes it a cinch, Lieutenant," she said, breathing deeply. "Lead the way. Phil's got a scientific mind just like I have, and he'd never let a bunch of stodgy rules stand in the way of scientific progress—like a certain Lieutenant I know."

She tugged at his arm. "Come on," she laughed. "I've got you licked and you know it."

He stood rock-still, expression grim. "Wait a minute. How long have you known Hudson?"

"Phil? I met him at the graduation hop a couple years ago. He always looks me up whenever he gets to Washington. Why?"

"Because he isn't the sort of person you should know," said Reggie coldly. "He's my commanding officer, and as such I'd take orders from him, but it just so happens that in the case of Aarn Logan—well, Elise," he finished, looking her square in the eyes, "I happen to know Hudson isn't everything the daily telecasters might say about him."

She frowned, matching the gravity of his expression. Then her lovely lips curled in a gentle, chiding expression. She squeezed his hand affectionately.

"Silly," she said softly. "You're jealous!"

She pulled at him and led him down the street at a happy, clicking pace.

They found Captain Philip Hudson sitting behind one of the intricately exquisite, yet staunch crystal-glass desks which were put out by the famous Glass & Sand Corporation of Mars. A lock of his blond hair fell over his handsome forehead as he scraped back his chair and came to his feet in surprise.

"Elise!" he cried, striding to meet her. Hudson was only five years Reg Mason's senior. "Welcome to Venus."

"Hello, Phil," she said, casting a malicious glance at Reg's set face, as she let Hudson hold her hand after shaking it. "Lieutenant Mason told me you were his commanding officer and I asked him to bring me up."

"But this is wonderful," Hudson said eagerly. His manner was so magnetic that even Reg felt it at times. "Absolutely wonderful that you're here! Reg, old fellow—how did you ever persuade Elise to make the trip? Tell me you'll be here long enough to let me show you around."

"Long enough to investigate the water-spout region of Venus," she answered. "I'm here on business. Purely. The Smithsonian wants a paper describing the water-spout region to include in its next annual report. I'm the one they're sending. And that's the reason we're here now. Go ahead, Reggie. Tell him."

"Oh," said Hudson, his smile suddenly disappearing. He drew his tall body erect, his long fingers playing with the insignia on his tunic. "If it's business I'll treat it as business."

"Miss Maynard," Reg said, with a casual nod at her, "wishes to accompany me in my police cruiser to the water-spout region, where we know Aarn Logan has been for the last five days, ever since he escaped in a

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stolen VCPC ship. I told her I'd put the matter before you."

"Application refused!" Captain Hudson's lips grew stubborn as he looked at Elise.

She started. "But—but Phil!" Her voice betrayed her surprise.

"I'm sorry, Elise." He spoke quietly, but she must have seen from the hard glitter of his dark eyes that he'd never yield.

Her lips tightened. "Why not?" she asked. "I've got a right to know why not, haven't I? I thought you were my friend."

"I am your friend." Hudson's face was suddenly boyish and pleading. He held out a hand and then let it drop, hopeless of making her understand. "It's for your own good," he insisted. "Aarn Logan is dangerous. One of the worst pirates of the last decade. He and his crew of freebooters have been pirating Martian and Venusian as well as Terrestrial shipping for a year. We had him in jail, but he escaped—a dangerous man. Elise—be reasonable."

"Never mind," she said coldly. "I'll wait for you in the outer office, Reg." She swished her green skirt around, her face set and angry, and slammed the door viciously behind her.

HUDSON let out a sigh and sought his desk chair, ruffling through papers.

"Difficult girl," he muttered. "Now let's see, Lieutenant. You're due to hit heaven at seven A.M. Venus Arbitrary Time. Your ship will be fueled and outfitted and waiting for you at number Ten Sky-Field—that's under the south-west sky-hatch. Here's your clearance papers. I think that's all."

Reg Mason took the papers, folded them carefully and put them in an inner pocket.

"Where shall I bring the prisoner, sir?"

Hudson continued to look at his desk for an unnecessarily long time. When he glanced up, his eyes were veiled.

"Here, I suppose."

"Very well."

Reg turned and started toward the door, but he knew he would never reach it without saying his piece about what he thought concerning the Aarn Logan affair. He knew that as sure as he knew his name was already mud so far as Hudson was concerned. He had a strong sense of fairness and he would never commit an injustice without a protest. So he turned back toward Hudson.

As if half-expecting that, Hudson was already on his feet, leaning forward a little, the tips of his ten fingers balancing him on the desk, ready and waiting, as if this were a challenge.

"I had a five-minute talk with Aarn Logan before he escaped, sir," Reg said coldly. "He told me everything. And I guess I believe him."

"You have your orders, Lieutenant," said Hudson, his voice starting out soft and ending on a knife-edge. "I know you talked with Aarn."

"I have my orders, Captain," said Reg, meeting the baleful eyes. "Don't worry. I'm enough of a policeman to follow them out. Good-day, sir."

He closed the door, but behind him Hudson continued to stare after him.

CHAPTER II

The Osmotic Planet

DUE to changes in temperature of the noxious atmosphere, the outer surface of the long glass dome which overlay Venus City was water-slimy from the constant condensation of vapors. At the south-west end of the dome, about a hundred feet up from the floor of the swampy jungle which ever pressed in toward the city, a circular sky-hatch slid smoothly apart.

Out of the airlock thus revealed, a spherical ship was ejected forcefully toward the lower cloud bank of Venus. Inside the ship, Reg Mason rocked erratically back and forth in his bucket chair, counting ten, slowly, before his fingers dropped to the console and played on the rocket-control buttons. Just as the ship reached the upward limit of its ride toward the heavens from the sky-catapult, and was about to drop back into the nolapyr-trees, twin rocket flames cut through the gloom and the ship soared, skirting the top of the jungle.

Reg Mason's swelling chest relaxed with a sigh, and a slow, relieved grin replaced the tenseness which was always his whenever the electric catapult held his ship in its grip.

"I feel like the silver-ball in a pin-ball machine just before the customer lets go," Reg once had wryly told the field machinist just before he climbed into the ship.

The take-off accomplished, Reg settled down to the business at hand, and some of his satisfaction at having finished with the catapult ordeal faded when he reminded himself of his duty, which was to bring in Aarn Logan. He checked with the triolite-needle once more—the same needle that was reacting with the molecular pattern of a microscopic bit of triolite set into the hull of Logan's stolen VCPC cruiser and nodded glumly. Aarn's ship was still there, near the famed water-spout region of Venus. Aarn would be there, too, because even though he went on hunting expeditions, he'd have to make the ship his base—the only source of pure water.

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Reg frowned in bitter distaste for a grimy job. Aarn Logan wasn't entirely innocent of the charges laid against him, but he wasn't as guilty as the telecasters had made him out to be. Still, Reg Mason was a policeman. As a policeman he would act. Well, anyway he didn't have Elise Maynard along to make the business more messy.

Reg Mason didn't notice the supply locker door near the humidifier beginning to open. He didn't see a rather green-faced figure step out. He didn't see the air-suited figure stagger toward him, didn't see the figure plop against the bulkhead, and slowly, tearfully slide to a sitting position on the cold deck-plates. Didn't see it until the figure spoke.

"Reggie," a voice whimpered. "I'm—I'm sick."

"Good grief!" Reg Mason ripped out the expletive and stared with sudden comprehension through the rear-view-plate, before he whirled around in the bucket seat. His temper sizzled. Then he felt like groaning and did.

"Elise!" he shouted. "Why did you do it? Don't you realize I can be broken for this? It's against regulations!"

"Your darned old r-regulations," she whimpered. "I suppose it's regulations to let me d-die."

From all appearances, she was about to die. The fresh rosiness of her face had given way to a definite greenish cast. Her long-lashed eyes were bulging. It looked as if one could expect the worst at any time. Reg Mason choked back any other futile thing he might have a mind to say, though he was thinking plenty, and ripped open the door of the medicine chest. He shook soda into a glass, spurted water into the glass from the water tank, and thrust the bubbling stuff to her lips.

"Drink!" he commanded.

She rolled her eyes up at him groggily, and he tilted the glass. Most of it went down her throat. She retched and hid her face against the bulkhead. Reg went back and sat in the bucket-seat, watching her, his young face grim. Finally, she levered herself stiff-legged into a chair, and sat there with her head drooping against her chest.

"That's the first t-time I was ever thrown from one of those catapult things," she muttered. "They've got more civilized ways at the regular space-ports. Somebody ought to make an investigation of the inefficient methods of the VCPC. I've got half a notion to form a committee myself."

"I'm glad you're beginning to feel better," said Reg acidly. "Now kindly explain why in the name of the eleven habitable worlds you had the sheer brass nerve to stow yourself away aboard my ship."

Her golden brown hair was hanging over her face. Her shaking fingers rearranged it as she brought her head up. Her eyes couldn't meet his.

"It didn't take nerve. You told me exactly where your ship would be when I asked you, and I—I thought you might just barely be inviting me to go along if I got aboard without your kn-knowing it. So I guess it might just barely be—well, your fault as much as mine!"

SHE straightened her body up primly at the last and stared him straight in the eyes. She was feeling better, all right, thought Reg, with growing indignation. She was throwing the whole thing onto him, and it wouldn't be any time at all before he would feel he was a heel. He opened his mouth to answer.

"And besides," she said, rushing in before he could speak, "nobody has the right to stop the march of science. I have to get out to the water-spout region today—tomorrow at the latest."

"Deadline, of course," Reg said smolderingly, sarcastically. "You know there hasn't been a water-spout in fifteen years."

"Who has a better right to know it than me—than I? Now see what you're doing, you're making me forget my grammar. Of course, there hasn't been a spout in fifteen years. But my—uh—my colleagues at the Smithsonian have got some pretty complete figures to show that the skin of Venus is about to burst again. Another water-spout is due. And I think you'd feel pretty mean, Reginald Mason—" her voice rose severely and she held one white index finger up in the air toward him "—if there was a water-spout and you knew you had kept me from observing it."

Reg slowly slid down in his bucket seat until his long, blue and gray clad legs were stretched out before him. He regarded Elise Maynard with disfavor for a long moment. He deliberately swung around toward the console board, made some minute corrections.

The oblate spheroid that was the ship was skimming along over the top of the grim, absolutely impassable jungle. Twin search beams in the nose of the ship laid down a path of light through the twilight gloom.

There was always twilight on Venus, no matter whether the side you were on was facing the sun or not. The two cloud layers did that. They were like mirrors, distributing sunlight evenly around the planet, and you never saw the sun from the surface.

Reg stared glumly through the view-plate. He was defeated. Elise Maynard was a spoiled brat, and she had been spoiled by men, too, particularly Reg Mason.

"Well?" came Elise' voice, malicious with knowledge. "What's the decision?"

"You know what the decision is," Reg growled.

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She came forward, sat down on the edge of the instrument board, and her attractive eyes turned almost shy.

"Reggie, I want to tell you what a swell fellow I think you are for letting me go along."

"Thanks," he said dryly.

"I mean it. Reggie, you know I always go around telling people I'm a full-fledged geologist. Well, I guess I know as much about it as most people. But—well, Reggie, I never have had a real, honest-to-goodness job and I never will get a real job, a chance to head an expedition, say, unless I do something big, first. They just laugh at me at the Smithsonian because I'm so young. I bulldozed them into giving me this job—well, in the first place they don't think there's going to be another water-spout either."

She was shamefaced, but beneath that there was defiance, stubborn pride. "I convinced them, though, that I had studied the figures enough to almost prove there was going to be a spout," she continued. "They let me have my way and told me that even if there wasn't a spout I could write a paper on the subject. So this is my big chance."

Reg Mason studied her with interest. "Go on," he said gruffly.

"Thanks, Reg." She wet her lips. "You see, ever since the last spout, Venus has been losing water at the rate of fifteen million gallons a day. That's what the figures prove. They found the figures by taking the daily tidal readings over a number of years."

"Maybe it evaporated into space?" Reg hazarded.

"No, Reg," she said fiercely. "Don't you see? Water never gets as far as the upper cloud layer and the upper cloud layer is formaldehyde. The only place that water has been going is deeper down into the planet. Venus, Reg, is a sort of cosmic mud-ball. It's soggy all the way through. It's a sort of celestial example of osmosis—well, you wouldn't know about that."

Reg sat straight up. "Who says I don't?" he snapped.

"Well, you never were much of a scientist," she said defensively.

"Osmosis," said Reg balefully, "is the process by which liquids pass through membranes or other porous substances under the influence of molecular forces. After a time, the membranes burst."

ELISE applauded him in open admiration and smiled in a dazzling manner.

"Good, good," she said. "That's exactly it. According to the established theory, that's what happens on Venus. Under the swamps and the oceans, Venus is enclosed in a tight porous membrane formed of the vegetable and animal bodies that have been dying and collecting for millions of years, a membrane that is probably miles thick and almost as solid as limestone. Because of the osmotic principle, water is continually drawn through that membrane and once in awhile the membrane bursts. The reason it bursts where the water-spout region is, is because that's where the membrane comes closest to the surface. See?"

Her face was as full of the same animation Reg had seen it exhibit when he had been holding her in his arms and leading her through an intricate dance at some exotic night-spot. Reg regarded her with some awe.

"Talk about leading a double life," he cried. He grabbed her hand with affection. "Upstart, I do believe you've got everything. But now it dispenses with talk, and it gives with action. In half an hour, we'll be over the water-spout region, and I'll be looking for Aarn Logan. I've got some adjustments to make on the photo-amplifiers and all I ask is this—that you skip back to the little anteroom aft and powder your nose or sumpin' while I locate the big bad outlaw. Then you come back here and I've got a plan of action for us laid out."

"Oh-oh!" she exclaimed. "I don't like that look in your eye, Reg Mason!" She regarded him with distrust.

"I'm the captain on this cruise," Reg said, half flippantly, half sternly.

Her expression was glum, but she smiled quickly, stopped and patted him on the cheek.

"Okay, you're a good egg—Reg. And don't worry. I'll keep the domestic end down while you find the meat."

She skipped away and Reg lost his smile as he fitted his mind to the problem of finding Aarn Logan.

CHAPTER III

Hudson Plays His Cards

SWIFTLY the nearly spheroid police cruiser was coming to the edge of the jungle-lands. Before it spread vast swamplands, surrounded by the mystery of unending jagged rows of mountain peaks. An aspect of gloom overlay this land, not entirely the result of the twilight. That swamp-land was intimately connected with the core of the planet, a core wherein even now immense osmotic pressures were building. Those mountains and mist-shaded valleys held what strange secrets, what strange forms of life? They had never been explored. But above all, in what hidden, rocky culvert had Aarn Logan parked his stolen VCPC cruiser? The solution of the problem lay with the photo-amplifiers and the triolite needle.

Reg Mason depressed the elevator controls,

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taking the ship at a slow spiral up toward the lower cloud-bank, out of possible sight of Aarn Logan. Reg guided the ship slowly along until the triolite needle was pointed straight downward. So Aarn was—below.

The ship was far above a mountain plateau leading to a cliff which in turn dropped off in terraces to the swamplands two miles down. Of course, Reg thought, Aarn would have his ship camouflaged in some impassable, rock-littered culvert. Reg swung the photo-amplifiers from the wall, attached his gaze to the eye-piece. And gasped!

Aarn Logan had apparently taken no trouble to keep out of sight. His ship, one of the banana-shaped old line patrol wagons, was resting against the cliff-face, on one of the terraced ledges. Reg frowned. A trap? Maybe.

He took one more look as the plate brought the scene into brighter relief. His eyes lighted with interest. Moving along the narrow trail that led to the ship was a heavy figure. Reg turned a dial and Aarn Logan's image leaped upward until it seemed he was a bare dozen feet away.

"Mind if I look?"

Elise had come into the room and was leaning over his shoulder. Reg turned. Elise's face was alight with curiosity.

"Could I keep you from it?" Reg said sarcastically. "Go ahead. Spy-glass view of Aarn Logan, the big bad pirate. Let's hear what you think of him."

She leaned toward the eye-piece breathlessly. Her almost childish delight was lost after a few seconds. Reg, watching with an expression of self-disgust, saw pain forming around her curved lips.

"Oh, Reg," she said softly. "He isn't the way I pictured him at all. He—he looks pathetic. I—I feel sorry for him!"

She straightened, staring at Reg in bewilderment.

Reg lighted a cigarette, came to his feet and threw the match forcefully on the deck-plates. He swung on her, his eyes savage.

"Why?" he charged. "Why should you feel sorry for him when you don't know about him? Or when you don't know the truth about Captain Phil Hudson?"

"There you go again," she snapped. "Making catty remarks about Phil."

Reg Mason snorted.

"Phil," she said in mincing tones. "Dear Phil—who happens to be a stockholder in a corporation formed for the purpose of free-booting Jovian shipping."

She put her hands on her trim hips and glared at him.

"You'll have a hard time making me believe that, Reg Mason. In the first place, an official of the VCPC isn't allowed to own stock in a civilian enterprise. In the second place, everybody knows the Allied Planets are diplomatically on the outs with the Jovian Worlds, and there's a sort of war going on all the time, undeclared. The Jovians loot our ships and we loot theirs."

Reg wagged his finger at her reprovingly. "Wait a minute, upstart. Don't go off on a tangent yet. You struck fire with your first objection. Of course, Phil Hudson isn't allowed to hold stock in a civilian enterprise. But he does. That's the point—he does! Not only that, he's a major stockholder, which makes him an official of the corporation. And not only that, he's the one formed the corporation in the first place. It's not a big corporation. It's a small corporation. Its tangible assets were one good, well-armed space-ship, one crew of bloodthirsty roughnecks, and a capable captain—Aarn Logan.

"Phil Hudson approached Aarn Logan in a frontier mining town on the other side of these very mountains. Aarn was working at a laboring job, trying to get enough money together to go back to Earth and start a cattle ranch. Hudson put an attractive proposition up to him. Hudson and the other stockholders would buy Aarn a ship, pay all the expenses of crew and equipment and supplies. Aarn would become a pirate and plunder Jovian shipping. It would be a fifty-fifty proposition. Aarn agreed. You believe me so far, Elise?"

UNACCOUNTABLY, her eyes filled with tears.

"You wouldn't lie to me, Reg. It's just that I hate to have my faith in people shattered."

"I'm sorry. That isn't even the worst part of the story. You don't know how big space is. It's deep and it's wide and it's long. A trillion trillion cubic miles right here in the solar system. Aarn Logan cruised his ship around in space for three months, looking for a Jovian merchant mariner. His crew grew restless. They were used to action. They were getting mental sicknesses. One day they mutinied against him and attacked a Martian ship. They just simply never saw a Jovian ship, and so they plundered this Martian. The next week they jumped a Venusian blunt-noser.

"The word went out up and down the length of the system that a pirate named Aarn Logan was loose in space. Police cruisers came after the pirates. Aarn Logan himself took command this time, because he had to, to save his own skin. He beat the police off, and after that, of course, it didn't much matter what he did. He became a pirate, full-fledged, attacking any ship of space the detectors picked up. He sold the plunder, and true to the bargain, delivered fifty percent of the takings to Phil Hudson.

"Three weeks ago, when Aarn Logan was captured, Phil Hudson threw him into solitary confinement, refusing to allow any in-

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terviews. But I'm a policeman. With a little finagling, I got in to Aarn's cell and talked with him. That's how I know all this—and I've checked from other sources. Finis."

"What will you do with him when you capture Aarn?"

"What can I do?" Reg scowled. "Nothing. I've taken my VCPC oath. I obey the orders of my superiors. I'll take Aarn back to Hudson—then let the wheels of the law turn as they will—or as Hudson let's them. That's as far as my jurisdiction goes."

He made an inclusive motion with his hand, then forced a grin. He jogged her under the chin with the tips of his fingers.

"Smile, baby. You super-geologist. We're going down to take a good look-see at the water-spout region."

"Wait a minute," she said quickly. "What about Aarn Logan?"

"That's my business. The water-spout is yours. So we'll part ways for awhile, upstart. Be quiet!" His voice grew stern as she started talking excitedly. She subsided into a chair open-mouthed.

"But Reg—" she began weakly, as he sent the ship plummeting down, but he quieted her into helplessness with another look.

The water-spout region resembled the swamplands from the air. In reality, it was a pitted, gouged mud-flats, bordered by mountain ranges. It had been drying up ever since the last water-spout fifteen years ago.

Reg Mason landed his spheroidal cruiser on huffing jets of flame. He got up, threw Elise Maynard an air-suit from the lazarette. She looked scared as she slipped it over her own garments. He determinedly opened the air-lock, quietly but firmly shoved her into it. She exploded.

"I won't! Reg Mason, you can't leave me down here all alone."

"There's no living thing in this neighborhood," Reg interrupted her sternly. "Go on. Remember, you asked for this. I'm following rules and regulations. By the time I come back here with Aarn Logan—and I'll be back, never fear—you'll have your business done and so will I. No wasted time, see? Now scoot!"

A few minutes later he closed the air-lock and went forward. She was standing disconsolately where he could see her through the view-plate. She couldn't see him, but she waved half-heartedly, then turned and trudged unhappily away. Reg lifted the ship with bursts of power that sent it at increasing speed toward the clouds.

He took the ship far around the other side of the mountain, fanned it along a bare half-dozen feet from the metallic ground of the humpy plateau and landed it. It was a hundred feet to the cliff edge, and from there a [illegible]e thirty feet down to Aarn's hideout.

This high above the jungle, Reg would need no air-suit, for the air was breathable. It was cold though, so he struggled into his heavy-duty cover-alls, already weighted down with bandolier and holstered Hampton projector.

He went swinging toward the cliff-edge, carrying over one arm a two hundred foot hank of rope. He got to the cliff, stretched himself out flat and looked over. Aarn's ship was below and the hatchway was open. Reg looped one end of the rope around a metal spur sticking from the ground and let himself down.

When he got to the ledge, he didn't even bother to go quietly. He entered the ship and scuffed along the metal catwalk toward the smell of coffee that was wafting from the galley. He drew his Hampton out of the holster.

WHEN he entered the galley, the man sitting at the tiny mess table raised his disheveled head, looking first at Reg, then at the gun.

"I go, cop," he said throatily. "You get no fight from me. I been waiting for this. I t'ink maybe you have a cup of coffee?"

"No, Aarn," Reg said gently. "We better go now."

"We go now. That's oll right. I yust t'ink I go back and own up to everything. Then maybe that rat Hudson get what's coming to him for turning on me, eh?" He rolled bloodshot eyes at Reg pleadingly.

"Aarn," Reg said determinedly, "I can't make any promises for you. Either you give up now or you don't."

"I give up now, don't worry, Mason," rumbled Aarn, twisting his red lips into a grin, but only succeeding in grimacing because his broad face was so dirty and full of beard, and his teeth blackened by chewing tobacco. He wiped the back of his hair-matted hand across his mouth, the loose sleeves of his shirt dragging through the saucer he had been drinking hot coffee from. He was a round short man. His shirt was open and his chest was furred like a mountain sheep. He noticed the way Reg was looking at him and made an impudent gesture.

"Many t'ings happen to me, young man," he said heavily. "I get so I don't care. This is not the life for me on this mountain-top. The other life in space—that wasn't for me. I am not a bad man. I yust a poor Danskä, and I should be back on the cattle ranch. We go now, eh?"

He arose with a heavy, vague sigh, and with many puffings pulled his coveralls around him, leaving his head uncovered.

"Bring your own air-suit with you, Aarn," commanded Reg. He only had one on board his own ship—Elise was using the other.

Aarn Logan draped the suit over his short

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arm and led the way. He paused beside the tiny engine room for a moment, looked inside as if considering something deeply. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

Outside, he saw the rope and shook his head.

"We go around by a path, Mason."

He took hold of the rope and jerked it so a wave of the rope traveled up along the cliff face. The upper end of the rope came free. Aarn coiled it with a series of dextrous movements around his left arm. He went ahead again, leading Mason along a precipitous path. They got to the ship in fifteen minutes. In less time than that, Aarn was comfortably seated in the control room, but he was locked to the guide rails. He sat there, his expressive, red-rimmed eyes dismal and unhappy.

Reg took his time about lifting the ship. Rules dictated that he complete his mission in the smallest possible amount of time, but in this case he felt as if a little rebellion would be good for his soul. Only the stars knew that when he finally delivered Aarn to Hudson the unjustness of the deal would keep him awake more than one night. He smoked two cigarettes, glumly. Well, Elise had been given an hour and a half to look over the water-spout region. He adjusted rocket studs, gave the U-bar a half-turn, and the ship slanted up.

He leaned back in the bucket-chair, carelessly guiding the ship along with one hand on the U-bar. He lost his lassitude in one second. The ship went haywire, jolted sharply, started dropping like a plummet to the mountain plateau. Reg yelled, threw in all his under pilot-jets. They didn't respond.

He didn't have the slightest idea what had happened. It was as if something had struck the ship. The ship was twirling stem over stern. The mountain plateau came up as if someone were throwing the whole thing at him. At the last second, his madly pounding fingers pressed a stud-combination that flung the ship skimming along the plateau to the cliff edge. The ship dropped again, straight down, for a full mile toward the water-spout region. Then he again got the ship under control, but it was only partial. The vessel continued to drop with a bucking, tossing motion.

Sweat poured down his contorted face as he madly manipulated the buttons on the console. Half of the rocket-jets were out.

Aarn Logan was straining against his chains, shouting hoarsely. Reg barely heard him.

"That rat Hudson! He do this, Mason. He knows I know, and he knows you know. I saw his ship in the plate."

Reg didn't have any time to look in the vision plate except to judge his distance above ground. Off to the left of the cruiser he saw the cliff-face, barely a hundred feet distant. At any moment the ship might bounce on the cliff, bounce off, and that would be that. The wobble was so bad that each time there was a zig-zag, he had to reset the rocket studs completely to allow for the change in direction. He got the ship away from the cliff, and with another blend of skill and nerves set the ship with a crunching jar on the edge of a bowl-shaped depression. The ship balanced there and then rolled down the bottom. But it came right side up.

REG groggily picked himself off the floor, went reeling around blindly. They had landed on the floor of the water-spout region. Elise shouldn't be far from here. He grabbed the guide rail to steady himself, to enable him to think clearly. Hudson! Hudson had done this.

Aarn Logan's voice boomed at him. "Mason! You hurry—Hudson, he coming now." Aarn's chains clanked in rage at his helplessness.

Reg got the meaning of that. He went for his Hampton, hanging on a peg over the console. Before he could get it, there was the sound of the inner airlock door being slammed open.

"I wouldn't, Mason!" a voice snapped. "Get your hands up!"

Reg started to reach for the gun anyway. He thought better of it, forced his hands up, turned around with a long, bitter sigh.

No one could doubt that the man holding the lusk-handled VCPC projector had a good, personal reason to shoot if Mason had resisted. Reg got the picture. Hudson had been waiting, far up against the lower cloud-bank, for Reg Mason to lift the ship from the plateau. Then he had dropped straight down, in a direction Mason wouldn't be looking, and at close quarters had grazed the cruiser with his own ship, shearing away or smashing half the after rocket-jets. When the damaged cruiser finally landed, Hudson had been waiting. He knew the air-lock combination, was inside the air-lock before Reg had picked himself up from the floor. His intentions now were only too evident.

CHAPTER IV

Sky-Trap

WITH unconcealed bitterness Reg Mason faced his commanding officer.

"So you decided you couldn't make a showing in a court of law, Captain Hudson," he said. "We know too much."

Aarn Logan strained against the guide rail, never shifting his savage stare from Hudson.

Hudson's helmet dropped back from [redacted] head as his left hand loosened the fasteni[redacted]

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His blond hair was disheveled, sweaty. Despite the control he maintained over his features he could not disguise his deep anxiety.

"Don't talk like that, Mason," he muttered hoarsely. "You can't know what agonies of mind I've gone through. I'm no murderer. I'm fighting for survival. You two are going to be all right. I wouldn't dream of harming you."

"You dream of harming us, oll right," Aarn Logan shot out. He was staring at Hudson beneath his bushy brows with the terrible glare of a Dane aroused. "You plan this so you get us out here alone. You fix it so I escape. You fix it so Mason come after me. Now you kill us."

"I'm not going to kill you," Hudson shouted, his face wild. "I've got an out-of-the-way asteroid stocked up for you two. I've been forced to it. I'm taking you there."

"Reg!"

All three men started. Reg's eyes widened. That had been Elise's scream. A second after that, the ship seemed to bump up and down as if the ground beneath it had quaked. There was a silence. Their hearts hammered. Then Hudson spoke in the voice of a man dazed with surprise.

"Elise is here too," he said blankly.

"Reg! The spout—I just saw something." Her voice was faint in their ears.

"Reg glanced at the view-plate, forgetting Hudson's weapon. Briefly he saw Elise, running toward the ship. Briefly, because then the ship tilted and Reg spun backward to crash into Hudson. There was a sound like the crashing of worlds and a ripping, earthquake roar. The ship whirled as if on an axis. Loose objects bombarded Reg. He felt a blow and his senses fading, but he had the sense to wrap an arm around a leg of the wrecked humidifier. As he lost consciousness, he was jammed against the deck plates, as if in a rising elevator. The ship was ascending at terrific speed, straight toward the sky. . . .

"Elise," Reg whispered weakly.

"Never mind Elise," a heavy, drugged voice answered. It was Hudson's voice. "She was outside when the spout broke loose. Poor girl!"

Elise gone—dead! The agonizing thought poured through Reg's brain. She was dead, and for the first time, as if the springs to his inner mind had been opened, he knew he loved her, cared for her as he would never care for another human being. The worst part of it all was he had never told her.

Several moments passed before he could force himself to face the living world again. His eyes opened wearily. The room was a mess and was turned upside down. The control panel was on one "wall," and Aarn Logan was lying chained to the "floor." Reg was lying next to Aarn. Aarn was looking at Reg Mason dully.

"That spout, she got us rolling and bucking around on top of her, Mason. You land the ship where the spout break loose, I t'ink."

Reg had trouble getting to his feet. The ship danced erratically, surging upward, dropping, bucking savagely to the side. Reg bit his lip, his face paling. Some of the observed water-spouts of Venus were more than a mile high, some of them a mile and a half.

Hudson was sitting against the opposite "wall," still holding his Hampton, but the weapon was drooping listlessly. Hudson appeared to be unhurt, but his face was haggard. Reg looked toward the control board, but Hudson grimaced and shook his head.

"Never mind them. I tried to work the studs. Transmission's gone. Besides that, the jets are full of water, and probably cracked. Radio's out. So's outside vision."

"Why don't you put that Hampton away?" Reg said in savage tones.

Hudson shrugged and sheathed the Hampton.

"I agree with you," he said quietly. "We've no quarrel now. I suggest you free our friend Aarn."

"I bane not your friend," Aarn snarled thickly. Reg stooped, unlocked the chains and Aarn rose, looking with hatred at Hudson.

"Quiet," Reg admonished. His set lips relaxed a trifle, and he punched Aarn on his meaty arm. "We'll work this out together, Aarn. What makes you so sure we're on top the spout?"

"What else, Mason?" Aarn tossed his head restlessly. "We go up, bucking around. We never go down. This ship round like a planet. She ride the spout all right, not like as if she was that banana-ship of mine. Sure, we on top the spout."

AARN was right, of course. Reg remembered his physics experiment with a paraffin ball suspended on a jet of water. An irregularly shaped object sluiced itself out of the jet. This ship, being an oblate spheroid, would be held up by evenly dispositioned forces. The ship was resting in a kind of watery cradle. How far was it above the surface of Venus?

Reg shuddered, closing his eyes. Momentarily, he saw Elise—but he had to thrust her out of his mind.

Hudson's voice came through the sound of rushing water—furiously streaming water—speaking in unsteady tones.

"Our problem is big enough to make us all stick together. I've investigated the food situation. We've got enough—well, enough to last the three of us a week. After that we'll begin to starve." His lips quirked. He fought to keep his face stiff. "These spouts last for weeks—months, some of them. If there's any way to get down—"

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"—it better be quick," Reg finished, grimly. "I know."

He turned his head upward, toward the airlock, the only opening in the ship. His eyes narrowed, and in the next second, stepping from projection to projection, he was hanging onto the guide rail under the airlock. He turned the valve and the door fell inward. A spray of water, soft as rain, splattered down. The lower cloud-bank of Venus could be seen. Reg dragged his body through the airlock, and perched himself on the edge, on top the askew ship. A forceful, erratic wind was blowing.

Well, this was the final proof. Petals of water, white, foamy, driven under terrific force, arched away from the ship as if the ship were sitting in the bowl of a tremendous cornucopia. Reg couldn't see down below, but he caught a glimpse of the mountains that ringed the water-spout area. He remembered landing the ship fairly near the precipitous cliff on which Aarn had parked his ship. He turned in the other direction—and gasped.

"Well, I'll be dodgasted!" he muttered.

His eyes grew big. Sometimes seventy-five—sometimes only one hundred and fifty feet away—was the cliff. On that cliff, on the ledge, directly opposite the petaling top of the spout, was Aarn's ship! Hope soared in Reg's breast. Such luck seemed almost miraculous.

"Baby!" he whispered. "If we can get across, somehow."

He dropped down into the interior, blurting out what he had seen.

Hudson's fingers worked nervously. "But how can that help us?"

"I'll find out," Reg muttered. He turned away, leaning against the bulkhead, trying to think. How could they bridge that gap to Aarn's ship? But instead of thinking of that, he couldn't get the memory of Elise out of his mind.

"Well," Hudson said after a long silence, "it isn't as if we have to figure this thing out in a minute, or an hour. With food enough for a week we've plenty of time."

Reg whirled on him.

"It has to be figured out now!" he snapped. He pointed downward with an insistently jerking finger. "There's a lake forming underneath us. Elise may be there, floating around. She's probably dead by this time, but she may still be alive. If so, every moment counts. She hasn't got enough food in her suit to last out a week. Don't stand there like a little tin Buddha, Hudson, contemplating eternity. You've got enough sins against you without adding to them. You're in this too."

His tone was scathing. He was talking to an officer who was superior to him no longer.

Hudson drew himself up contemptuously, the only defense he had against the combined hatred thrown at him by two men. The tableau held for a second, while the oblate spheroid that was the ship leaped and bucked and rolled and tossed, and balanced itself on the top of the water spout.

Aarn Logan spoke then. "You wait, Mason," he rumbled. "I got an idea."

He laboriouly forced his heavy body up to and through the airlock. After a few minutes, he came down again, his red-rimmed eyes gleaming with satisfaction. He held himself steady with one hand while he shoved a pinch of Copenhagen snuff under his lip.

"Mason," Aarn said slowly, "I can lasso that ship."

"What?" Reg held his breath, then let it loose. He laughed grimly. "I'll bet you could."

"Sure, I can," Aarn insisted. He flexed his giant arms. "This water spout, she is bending and leaning, sometimes near, sometimes far from the cliff. When the spout get near, I throw a loop around the after pilot-jet. We make a bridge, and there we are."

He gestured with his hands to show how simple it was.

"Oh, it take one, maybe two hours," he added hastily. "Then I make a lucky throw."

HUDSON'S eyes couldn't help but show their interest, but he kept himself aloof from the conversation. Reg grasped Aarn's meaty shoulder.

"You're pretty sure you can handle it? Oh, shucks!" he caught himself up. "At least there's no harm in trying."

Excitement caused him to shiver as he worked his way back to the lazarette. He took out two heavy coils of pliable rope and threw them to Aarn. Aarn caught them. Reg watched in fascination as Aarn, with penknife and fingers, spliced the two lengths of rope together.

But as Aarn worked, Reg caught a gleam of calculation in Aarn's eyes as he looked at Hudson. Reg comprehended. Of course. He threw a glance at Hudson. Hudson was nibbling his lower lip, thoughtfully. Hudson had a problem of his own for escape was a necessity. If they did get back to Venus City, Hudson would have to defend himself against the charges Mason and Aarn would level at him. Hudson, of course, could not allow Mason and Aarn to return with him.

Aarn finally finished. He surveyed his handiwork with satisfaction. Then he looked at Hudson with mock disconsolateness. He took the bundle of rope and tossed it aside.

"I guess I not try to lasso that ship after all, Hudson," he said simply. "I the only one that can do it, so I guess we stay up here and starve."

Reg Mason kept out of it. Hudson looked at Aarn Logan as if the pirate had taken leave of his senses.

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"What do you mean?" he said harshly.

Aarn's expression turned baleful. He took a threatening step toward Hudson.

"You know what I mean, Hudson!" he thundered. "You get me into this mess where poeple think I am a pirate. Now you get me out. I don't t'ink I go back to Venus City and have you lie against me. I t'ink maybe you write on a paper a confession that clears me. You do that, Hudson. Else we all starve."

A moment of silence followed. Hudson glared at Aarn. Reg Mason pursed his lips and watched the two men.

"I think he means that, Hudson," Reg said at last. "And I'm backing him up."

Hudson stood with his back to the bulkhead, both hands tightly gripping the guide rail.

"You're a pair of fools," he sneered. "Do you think I'll fall for that. I can stick it out a week, if you want it that way. By that time Elise will surely be dead. You'll have killed her."

Reg shook with inward rage. "Aarn, show this—this rat we mean business," he said in stifled tones. "Go on back to the galley and bring all the food out here. Then throw it overboard."

Hudson sneered.

"You wouldn't do anything like," he said coldly.

Reg said nothing. Aarn went back to the galley. Reg suddenly took his Hampton out and trained it on Hudson.

"Just to keep things on an even keel, Hudson."

Aarn brought every item of food from the galley, down to the last half tin of coffee. He hefted the bigger box of rations to his shoulder and inched his way up to the airlock. He was grinning widely. Hudson watched with a growing uneasiness.

"Wait a minute," he cracked out. "You fools don't know what you're doing. What if Logan doesn't lasso the ship?"

"Then he doesn't. Throw it out, Aarn!"

Hudson licked his dry lips, watching Aarn pushing himself through the airlock.

"You see we've got more reason to take a chance on starvation than you have," Reg said coldly. "Even if we do get back to Venus City, you can still pull a fast one that might put both of us behind bars or worse."

Aarn came down, started up with the second and last case. At that point, Hudson's hand shot out.

"Hold it, Logan," he said thickly. Aarn looked at him inquiringly. Hudson's hand shook. "I'll write you that confession."

Aarn dropped the case of rations.

"That's a good t'ing," he said throatily. "Mason—you dictate to him, eh?"

Reg's nerves relaxed. He holstered his Hampton unsteadily. "Okay. . . ."

CHAPTER V

Going Down!

AN HOUR later, when Reg gave Aarn a boost up toward the airlock, Aarn had in his pocket a complete, signed document which placed the blame for his piratical activities where they belonged. Reg did not have much doubt as to why Hudson had given in and signed the confession so readily.

First of all, Hudson must have known that both Reg and Aarn would have welcomed the slow process of starvation because that would have shown Hudson they meant business, as they very obviously did. Throwing all the food out would have hastened matters. Second, Reg suspected that Hudson was holding on to the thin hope that while searching for Elise, or for her body, the confusion would allow him to gain the upper hand again. As for Elise, Reg entertained little hope that she might be alive. Not now, after thinking it over. She must have been caught up by the water-spout, smashed against the ship.

He blinked rapidly as he tossed the rope coil up to Aarn. Elise, her quips, her sarcasms, the feminine characteristics that were hers—it was hard to think they were gone. She hadn't even been able to observe the water-spout before it tore her to pieces.

Aarn Logan's feet alone projected into the ship. The spout's flowery tip was moving in a slow circle, caused either by the wind up here or by evenly dispositioned forces at the spout's source. At times, the spout was only seventy-five feet from the cliff. In the two hours of trial and error that followed, Aarn always chose the moment of proximity to throw the loop.

He began to mutter balefully in his beard as he repeatedly failed. Then Reg, from below, heard Aarn roar mightily, saw him taking in slack, as the nose pulled tight. Aarn then paid out rope to allow for the to-and-fro motion of the jet, and twirled the near end around the valve wheel of the outer airlock door.

Aarn dropped into the interior, chuckling to himself.

"I do it," he cried, licking his lips free of streaming water, his eyes bright as fire as they rested on Hudson. "Now Hudson—you go."

Hudson blinked. Reg was nonplussed.

"No, you'd better go first, Aarn," he said.

Aarn deliberately shoved Reg out of the way. He swelled his chest threateningly.

"Listen!" he shouted, his face darkening. "I put the bridge up. I give the orders. You, Hudson, you go first! I take no back talk. I boss this show for awhile."

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Reg Mason looked at Aarn, tried to divine what plan lay behind those fiery eyes.

"Okay, Hudson," he said. "Go ahead. But first I'll take one precaution."

He relieved Hudson of his gun, quickly.

"Just in case," he added, stepping back.

Hudson bent a look of dislike on him, then clambered up through the airlock. Reg followed, watching as Hudson wound himself around the rope, inched his way along like a giant sloth, using his legs as a slide while his hands pulled him.

By the time Hudson was halfway across, there was a big sag in the rope as the spout came nearer the cliff. Hudson had to hang there, two miles above certain death should he let go. Then the spout retreated, the rope tightened. Hudson started off again. Reg prepared to follow.

Aarn stuck his head through the airlock and roared over the clamor of water and wind. "You stay back," he bellowed. "That Hudson, he rat!"

"What about it?"

Aarn's fist on Reg's knee held him motionless. His fiery eyes held him just as firmly. something in that look made Reg snap out his Hampton. He watched Hudson as he reached the cliff-edge, was pressed against the ship by the wind. Hudson was reaching into his airsuit for something now. In his rage Reg almost jumped from the hatch.

"The rat!" he roared. "He's going to cut it."

IT WAS true. Hudson had something in his hand that glinted dully. He hacked at the rope with it. The knife went through. The loose rope whipped in the wind.

Reg fired madly, but in that wind he missed his target. Hudson disappeared behind Aarn's ship. The bridge to safety was gone.

Reg Mason didn't hear Aarn shouting at him. How long he fired at the ledge, he had no idea. Then something happened that drove Hudson's perfidy, his plan to let them starve atop the spout, out of his mind, made him forget Aarn's incredible stupidity in letting Hudson go first. Reg Mason suddenly thought he must already be dead, because he heard a voice from the grave, calling his name.

"Reg!" That pitiful scream rose high above the sound of the wind. It was Elise's voice!

Reg turned around in the airlock toward that sound, a mad, impossible hope springing up within him. He choked, and spray from the spout washed at the tears that flooded from his eyes. He threw himself flat, clawed his way from the airlock, across the rough outer surface of the ship—clawed his way down the curve of the ship, unmindful of the winds that strove to lift him and throw him off. He held himself down by any projection he could—grab-rails, stubby pilot jets, periscopic eyes. Finally he saw Elise, hanging with both arms to the main forward rocket jet, washed now and again with spumes of water that threatened to tear her loose.

Reg reached her, wrapped one powerful hand around her wrist just as she lost her hold. He began to work his way back, slipped, rolled on his back, and caught a grab-rail with the tips of the fingers of his free hand. He lay there, panting. The ship bucked, allowed him to gain a more secure hold. He took complete advantage of that motion, swung Elise in an arc that laid her across the open airlock.

Aarn was there. He took the girl's body in his massive arms, and Reg tumbled down through the airlock, and helplessly lay on the deck plates, panting, sobbing, his muscles trembling from his Herculean efforts.

A half hour later, the flush of life came back to Elise. She lay on the bunk, unsmiling, white-faced, looking up at Reg Mason's anxiety-twisted features.

"You thought I was dead?" she whispered. "No, Reg. The spout took me up with the ship. My air suit saved me. When I got my bearings I was pressed into a notch between two jets. The water was coming up and holding me there."

"You ban lucky," Aarn told her.

Remembrance stiffened her face.

"Sometimes the spout or the wind tipped the ship and no water hit me," she said. "Then I hung to the jets. Then the water came again, and almost knocked the life out of me. I knew if the water ever let me alone long enough I'd be able to reach one of the grab-rails, then work my way up to the next jet. The next time the ship really leaned over, I took my chance and just barely made it. I crawled up, and up, and made it. Oh, Reg!"

REG told her the whole story later on, when they were sitting in the galley and drinking Aarn's strong coffee. About Hudson, the confusion, his decision to let them starve on the spout.

Elise quieted her shaking hands.

"I escaped that so we could starve together up here?" she chattered.

"No!" The expletive came from Aarn. He pounded his fist. "We don't starve! Mason, you t'ink me a fool, letting that rat Hudson go first. Eh? No. That's a good idea. You'll see, maybe. But first we escape this trap. I show you how. You two game?" He leered.

Elise shivered. "I trust you, Aarn. Anything for a change of scenery."

"Me, too—I guess." Reg's assent was halfhearted.

"Okay! Then I show you how. We flood the ship, and we go—down!"

They were ready an hour later, airsuits zippered, water-proofed with beeswax, helmets buckled down. Reg had already anticipated Aarn's plan. He climbed to the con-

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trol board, hanging onto the bucket seat. He opened the gas-orifices to the rocket jets a degree—and water came spurting up through the floor-plates. Within a few minutes, it was swirling around Elise and Aarn's ankles, then their knees, their hips.

Aarn grinned. "The ship, she sinking now, oll right. The spout is flowing around the ship. The sides of the ship yust like walls holding us in an elevator shaft."

"Right," said Reg from above, and he couldn't resist throwing a malicious glance at Elise, who had thought him so bogged down in regulations that he didn't know his science. "The sides of the spout are pressing us in, because they're moving up slower than the central core. The slower a current of water—or air or anything—the more pressure it exerts. But the big danger is that as the ship gets heavier, it'll begin to wobble and maybe break through the walls."

The water finally covered Aarn and Elise. They touched little valves in the sides of their air-suits—air-suits which were as good or better than diver's equipment—and the suits inflated. They floated. When the water started to cover Reg, he opened the gas-orifices all the way, and floated to the top of the ship with them, where there was a pocket of air.

"The ship, she going down like mad," Aarn said hoarsely.

Around them, the water surface was bubbling, tipping, washing over them, then breaking away. The ship was wobbling—badly! It was trying to punch holes in its own confining walls.

Reg sensed catastrophe before it occurred.

"Hang on!" he yelled. Everything became scrambled. The ship turned head over heels and so did Reg. There was the sensation of being flung from a catapult, of traveling in a vertiginous arc through unimpeding atmosphere. The ship struck something, paused, fell more slowly, struck again and was quiet.

Reg swam around in complete darkness. He found an arm that belonged to Elise. He pulled her after him. He reached the airlock door, to discover Aarn ahead of him. They worked the wheel together, the door swung open. Three air-suited figures slowly floated up through the twenty-foot deep lake the spout had created. They broke the surface.

Around them, big quart-size drops of "rain" fell hollowly. A quarter of a mile away rose the spout, with such compact unhurriedness that it seemed to be a great column of white stone, losing girth as perspective diminished. The top of the spout was a needle-point, far up.

"Well, I guess I've got a paper to write," said Elise, floating.

"If we ever get back to civilization," said Reg.

Aarn Logan was busy examining the cloudy lake shore. Excitement caused him to splash about wildly.

"We get back! Look. Hudson's ship. She beached herself."

It was true. Reg looked with interest at the vague shape a mile away. Good. It offered a chance of escape. But other problems were unsettled—big ones.

"Hudson," Reg said succinctly. "He's probably on the way back to Venus City in your ship, Aarn. He'll be waiting for us, or else have an alarm out to shoot us down on sight."

Aarn started to say something, but then Reg heard a sound, like the muted thrum of rocket-jets thrown back from the sky. Elise heard it, too, turned her face up.

"There!" she exclaimed. "It's Phil, Reg—it's Phil!"

Aarn Logan stifled a curse as he followed Elise' pointing finger. Reg looked long and hard at the tiny shape of Aarn's ship. Tiny? It grew in size. It was plummeting down at an unholy speed, apparently straight at them.

"What's he—what's he going to do?" Elise whispered.

Reg's voice rose. "That's easy to surmise. He must have seen our ship sinking down through the spout. He was watching from the cliff edge. Now he's got us caught in his photo-amplifiers."

AARN rolled over in the water staring up at the descending ship.

"That Hudson shoot us down, now," he said dolefully.

It was evident that something in Aarn's plan had gone drastically wrong. Reg glumly looked at Hudson's beached ship. Well, it was nice to know they might have had a chance anyway.

"Maybe we can sink down to the bottom of the lake," Elise said faintly.

"Not enough time to deflate," Reg said huskily.

Nor would they have enough time. The banana-ship was coming straight down, as if it were being dropped on a swiftly unwinding cable. The thunder of its rockets rose in a peak of sound that drowned the hollow drumming of "rain" around them. At the last moment, Reg made a frantic attempt to throw his body over Elise' airsuited figure, to shield her. He vaguely remembered seeing Aarn trying to sit up in the water, vaguely heard his shouted curses, saw his shaking fists.

The banana-ship suddenly slanted, roared at them down in a steep dive. Reg saw the one-inch Grebbel canon-gun in the nose of the ship spitting flame. Little fountains of water rose some twenty feet away, and the fountains seemed to run toward them, in a straight line.

"Duck!" Reg screamed senselessly, because there wasn't any place to duck. He buried his face in water.

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After that there was a sound like the splitting of worlds—an explosion, a tremendous concussion that lifted Reg, threw him in a thirty foot arc and smacked him back onto the surface of the lake again. Wildly he rolled over, thinking of Elise.

He stared straight up.

What he saw made him blink.

The banana-ship had become a fiery, expanding mass of torn and twisted metal. For a second, it hung in the air, riven into no less than ten separate fragments. There was another explosion. The fragments shot away from each other, and Reg automatically curled himself into a tight ball.

He straightened right away, though. He heard Aarn's great, roaring shout, saw Elise swimming dazedly around in circles. Of the banana-ship there remained in the air only a lingering cloud of dissipating smoke. There was no banana-ship, no Hudson. Reg reached Elise, held onto her arm, his voice so choked up he couldn't speak, for a minute.

"What—what happened?" he finally called at Aarn, who was paddling toward them.

Aarn's red lips were grinning widely.

"You see?" he cried. "I do nothing silly, as you t'ink, Mason. Sure, I make Hudson go across the rope first. I hope he cut it. That fool Hudson!"

Aarn looked as if he'd spit in disgust if there were a place for such an act inside his helmet.

"Hudson fix it for me to escape from prison, but the ship is a no-good ship only good for a few hundred miles at a time," he went on. "Hudson knew I couldn't get off of Venus, Mason, and I know it, too. So I land ship on the cliff-edge and dry out all the rocket fuel."

He looked triumphant. Reg whistled. Liquid fuel flowed evenly, exploded in small, even bursts. Dry fuel was "spotty," and as soon as the igniting spark struck it, the first over-size explosion would detonate the rest of it, almost instantaneously.

"I t'ink that maybe Hudson come for me personally, Mason. So I rig up a detonator connected with the fuel tanks. As soon as Hudson come in ship, I was going to press key and we both die. When you come, it ban different. I no do that to you. When Hudson took ship up off ledge, it travels okay on liquid fuel in jets. When liquid fuel gives out, den it explodes. I guess we don't worry about Hudson anymore, eh?"

"Another ten seconds, and we wouldn't have had to worry about anything," Reg said wryly. "But it was a good trick."

He punched Aarn impulsively on the shoulder. "We'll give that confession to the proper authorities, Aarn. At the most, you'll get a couple years—they might even just give you a good talking to and let you go. Whatever it is, your name will be cleared. Which is a relief for me too!"

He rolled over in the water toward Elise. He grinned at her engagingly.

"Before you write that scientific paper of yours, upstart, there's another paper I want to discuss. A marriage license. Any chance for a—" his voice suddenly turned unsteady "—for a fellow that almost lost you once?"

"You know there is, Reg," she said quietly. "There always has been."

And she hurriedly paddled off. The two men followed, toward the waiting ship.

Jerry Morse's biggest future film publicity stunt backfires when an imitation space pirate turns out to be the real thing in

PERCY THE PIRATE

A Humorous Story by HENRY KUTTNER Coming Next Issue!

Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign

Of Tired Kidneys

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

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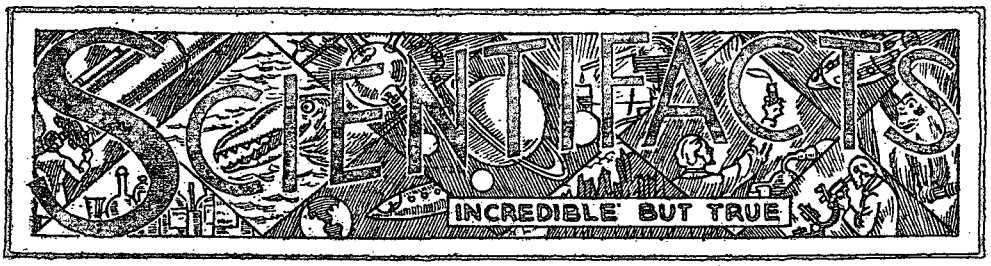

ROBOT BREAD

POWDER metallurgy, they call it. It isn't new in principle, but wartime needs have wrought a mechanical miracle in this process. Imagine a pile of finely powdered metal so impalpable that a breath would blow it away. Put a mixture of two or more metal powders—depending on just what you are trying to produce—in a mold and then use a ram with about twenty tons' pressure to compress the powder into a brick.

These green briquettes are then baked in what is called a sintering furnace at a temperature well below their over-all melting point, and come out as hard and durable as many grades of steel.

Before we got into the present war only small parts were thus made—"pills" the engineers called them, metal bits that never weighed as much as three pounds.

Today, thanks to the sintering process, metal parts for all sorts of machinery are made in myriad sizes and shapes, from small items that weigh only one-twentieth of an ounce up to tank bearings weighing sixty-five pounds.

This new process saves millions of man-hours and produces fine parts which can be made in no other way, including self-lubricating bearings which suck up oil and gradually dole it out over a lifetime which is longer than that of the machine of which they are part.

Plastic metal, you say? No, more on the order of metal bread and cookies for such a creature as Captain Future's giant robot, Grag. Otho, pass Grag some tungsten-carbide cake. Don't bolt it, Grag, there are plenty of nuts in it.

POWDERED SURGERY

LYCOPODIUM for babies, talcum powder for adults. One of the latest developments in surgery deals with the treatment of angina pectoris. This condition is the hardening or constriction of the coronary arteries, whatever the initial cause, shutting off the heart's blood supply. Yet there is usually an ample blood supply coursing through the pericardium vessels.

Drs. Samuel A. Thompson and Milton J. Raisbeck of New York Medical College have devised a simple but daring operation to detour this plentiful blood to the heart pump lines.

They incise carefully to the heart sac and sprinkle two drams of sterile talcum powder onto the inner wall of the pericardium and the surface of the heart. This operation takes only half an hour or less.

Then Nature takes over. A certain inflammation sets up, causing a permanent adhesion of the two surfaces, connecting the blood vessels of the pericardium to the heart itself and setting up a new circulatory phase. As yet this operation is only performed on carefully selected patients, and fits them only for normal, not strenuous, living.

But whoever heard of powdering internal vital organs before? Powder for babies, flour for breads, powdered sugar for sticky candies and cakes, and now talc for the life pump. Grandma, please pass me your sachet! I never use snuff.

BEN THE TITAN

BIG BEN, whose chiming spells and symbolizes all most dear to Britishers the world over, was ordered in 1844 when the Houses of Parliament were under construction. After much argument and heated discussion, Professor George Airy, the Astronomer-Royal, lay down the conditions, two of which staggered the clockmakers.

First, the clock must register the time of day correct to one second by the first toll of the hour bell, and, second, it must telegraph its performance to Greenwich Observatory twice daily where a record could be kept. No public clock driving long and heavy hands and controlling ponderous striking mechanism had ever operated on such an exacting schedule before.

But Edmund Beckett Denison, the co-referee, invented his now famous Grimthorpe Gravity Escapement. E. J. Dent, a highly skilled chronometer maker, set about manufacturing the precision machine Denison had designed.

The clock was finished in 1854, and installed in 1859 when the tower was ready for it. The hour bell weighs fourteen tons, while the quarter-hour bells weigh several tons each. The hands originally designed weighed

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two-and-one-half tons, and were too heavy for the clock mechanism to drive.

Denison redesigned the hands, making the hour hands of cast gun metal—half the weight and a set of minute hands of flat copper tubing with interior webbing which, although fourteen feet long, weighed less than two hundred pounds each.

The clock itself, looking not unlike a huge printing press bed, weighs five tons and has some parts as light and fine as those of a good watch. It is driven by weights which descend almost to ground level when running down and which are hauled back up by electric motors. The pendulum alone weighs nearly seven hundred pounds.

The four dial faces are more than twenty-two feet in diameter, the figures two feet high. In all the years it has operated, Big Ben—named for Sir Benjamin Hall, the huge Chief Lord of the Woods and Forests—has never been more than four seconds off.

Who says that time doesn't hang heavily on the hands?

THE EYES HAVE IT

SOME time ago in this department we mentioned the South American fish with bifocal eyes. Here are some interesting facts reported by the Better Vision Institute.

The retina of the human eye is 3000 times as sensitive as the fastest photographic film. The optic nerve connecting eye and brain contains more than a million nerve fibers. Eighty-five percent of our knowledge, understanding and enjoyment of life comes to us through our sight.

Reindeer and polar bears have a third eyelid, a thin membrane which can be drawn over the eye as protection against snow blindness. Snakes also have a protective storm window over their eyes, a transparent membrane to save the organs from injury. Humans and most animals have the eye protected mostly by the upper lid. Frogs, mice, elephants and camels are the reverse. Thus, they seem to wink up.

The area of the pupil of the human eye is sixty times greater when fully expanded than when fully contracted. The largest eye in nature is the eye of the blue whale—about four inches in diameter. The eyes of an owl—as large as those of man—are so long and snug in their sockets that the eyeballs must be pulled back by a special set of strong muscles so the lids can be closed. The rhinoceros pulls his eyeballs in and swirls them around to moisten them. It is much easier for us just to blink.

To all of which the moral is—don't strain or overtax your eyes. They are your most precious possession. Jarvis, hand me my dark goggles, I'm sitting in the first row at the Follies tonight.

COLORFUL MINK

THE shortest poem we know about mink is the succinct one by the man who spent the night on a mink farm. "Mink stink," he said. But today we can say, "Mink are pink."

Due to scientific cross-breeding, it has become possible to raise these potential fur coats in a beautiful pink color. According to a report from the United States Department of Commerce, mink may soon come to the fur market, like Joseph's coat, in many colors. We quote:

"The mink industry expects to produce golden, cameo (white skins with black guard hairs) and light pastel shades, such as lilac, pink, and light blue."

Fur farmers have also been experimenting with cross-breeding foxes for color. Golden platinum fox skins are being offered on the market this year for the first time.

If memory serves us correctly, we reported in these columns not long ago about the Bronx Zoo restoring the red color to the plumage of captive scarlet flamingoes by a special diet. Now, with selective cross-breeding to obtain certain colors of fur pelts, it seems you won't have to dye it. Pardon us; that pun has an awful blue tinge. It must be Monday.

PEAS OF ANTIQUITY

THERE were three little withered peas in a basket in King Tutankhamen's tomb about which the world has heard very little. Yet these tiny legume seeds bid well to prove more precious than the forty million dollars' worth of precious stones and other articles exhumed by the archeologists.

An English archeologist who had worked at the Tutankhamen excavation sent an American friend these three withered peas in 1936. On a whim, the recipient, Major Walter G. Dyer, of Portsmouth, Rhode Island, planted them.

To his amazement and delight, these 3,300-year-old peas sprouted as though they had recently come from a seed shop. The major harvested his crop carefully and replanted it the following spring. That year he harvested almost a pound and a half of peas. Some of

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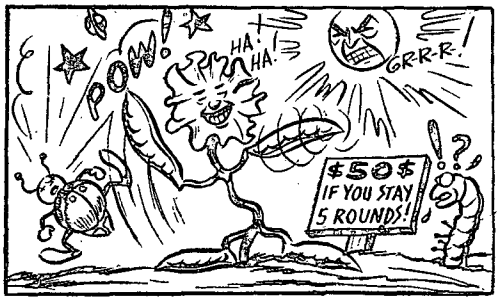
these he stored, and some he ate. They proved very tasty.

To make a long story short, the major took the peas to Florida with him where they were planted long past the regular pea season. To the surprise of everyone, all the peas sprouted and grew.

Then the most significant feature was noted. The hardy out-of-season peas were given a wide berth by the worms, beetles and green lice which were having a picnic with all other vegetation in the vicinity. Undoubtedly the ancestors of these peas were scourged by ancient Egyptian pests, but during a three-thousand-year rest, their natural enemies seem to have vanished.

Thus, we bid fair to have a new and sturdy variety of peas on the market within the next decade, called the King Tut pea.

The seeds are dark, a sort of rust color, grow from four to six in a pod, and are



longer and flatter than the kind most familiar to our tables. The blossom is smaller and is tinted pink on the white wings. The legume's resistance to drought and pest seems almost supernatural, but many agriculturists in Florida are waiting anxiously for a chance to grow crops of this ovule from the distant past.

ARTIFICIAL COSMIC RAYS

ACCORDING to science, evolution is constantly continuing. The present theory —and it seems a tenable one—is that the cosmic rays which continually bombard the earth from outer space affect the genes and chromosomes of germ-cells, occasionally causing a new or different creation, whether plant or animal.

These startling variations are called "sports" by science, and are not explanable by the laws of heredity. Some of them prove good, and some of them are not so good.

But now science hopes to find out just how much and what sort of effect the cosmic rays do have on life. In spite of their power—and cosmic rays are the highest form of energy known—the entire lot of these tiny rays which strike the earth each second could probably be compressed into a wad the size of a rifle bullet.

Dr. Donald Kerst has invented an atom-smasher which he calls a betatron and which will produce cosmic rays along a controlled channel with a twenty-million-volt energy. For energy comparison, you might think of the two-hundred-thousand volt X-rays now used in deep cancer therapy. A group of physicists at the University of Illinois is now working on this super atom-smasher to see and study its effects.

Who knows, with artificial cosmic rays at our command, we may create new fruits, vegetables, animals—super-humans to populate the world of tomorrow.

Professor, will you please run a couple of shots of juice through that pink elephant walking along the ceiling? Or have you already done so?

INSIDIOUS NEEDLE

"THE blood is the life," goes the old saying, and doctors and scientists have sampled it here and sampled it there and have done many marvelous things with it since the day of Dr. Harvey. But it has remained for comparatively recent men of science to discover a method of taking blood samples, not from a surface vein or a finger or the lobe of the ear, but from the site of the internal organ itself under study.

As startling as this sounds, the technique is fairly simple as described by a group of Atlanta doctors. More recently the method has been perfected by a group of Bellevue medical men under the guidance of Dr. Andre Courmand.

Briefly, a tiny notch is cut in the patient's vein at the elbow and a long and incredibly thin catheter is gently inserted into the vein. It is fed carefully up the arm and into the right side of the heart without disturbing a single beat and on down to the veins which lead to the kidneys or the liver where a specimen of blood can be procured from the spot under investigation.

The passage of the flexible catheter is watched and guided by a skilled anatomist who observes its progress through a fluoroscope.

This technique may open a new field of medicine and scientific research.

Watson, we fear your needle is a back number. And, Doctor, while you are probing my liver, how about a complete lubrication job? There are a few squeaks in the old chassis.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

FISH and celery are really not brain and nerve foods. But we have been learning that man actually is what he eats. And comes now Professor T. Cunliffe Barnes of the Hospital of Philadelphia with the announcement that the food elements the brain

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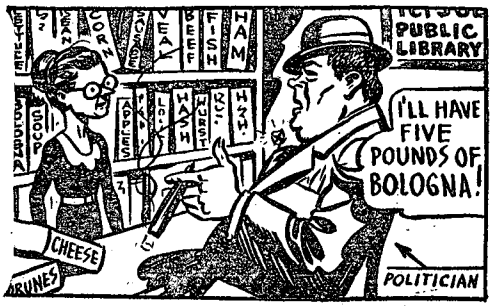
receives from the blood have a great deal to do with the activity of the mind.

The science of measuring the electric impulses in the brain—encephalography to you students of Sergeant Saturn—reveals that



brain waves have been erroneously linked to intelligence. These electric potentials of the mind are vitally linked to the chemical reactions in the brain. The source of these chemicals is the brain's supply of blood. The blood gets its chemicals from the food one eats and the air one breathes. So there you are. You think according to what you eat and not because of how much you have read.

Specifically, the essential substance of brain activity is a common chemical of the body—acetycholine. Says Dr. Barnes:

"It is truly amazing that all our complex mental life is due to acetylcholine, which is a simple organic compound of acetic acid (found in vinegar) and of choline(present in many fatty substances and in egg yolk)."

Quick, Bridget, bring the master a glass of malt vinegar—and this is no yolk.

INVERTEBRATE CONTRASTS

WHICH brings us to our giant and dwarf comparison of the month. Today, students, let us consider the largest invertebrate animal Mother Nature has constructed. This is the giant squid, a squirmy gentleman of the briny deep who has ten long arms, two of which are longer than the others. A first-class specimen of this family grows to a length of fifty feet and weighs about two tons.

We might mention in passing that the giant squid is a favorite article of diet on the menu of the sperm whale. The hugest vertebrate feeds on the greatest invertebrate.

The smallest animal classified by science is the protozoon. These gentry are one-celled invertebrates of microscopic size, there being more protozoa in one cubic foot of sea water than there are whales or squid in all the seven seas.

However, more recently the electron microscope has discovered heads and tails on minute creatures only one-quarter of a millionth of an inch long. These midgets, bactiophage which feed on certain intestinal germs, are so small that one thousand of them can congregate on the point of a pin without stepping on each other's corns!

RED SUN-OF DANGER, a Complete Captain Future Novel by BRETT STERLING—THE ISLE OF UNREASON, a Hall of Fame Story by EDMOND HAMILTON—and many other headliners in the gala Spring issue of

STARTLING STORIES

Now on Sale—15c at All Stands!

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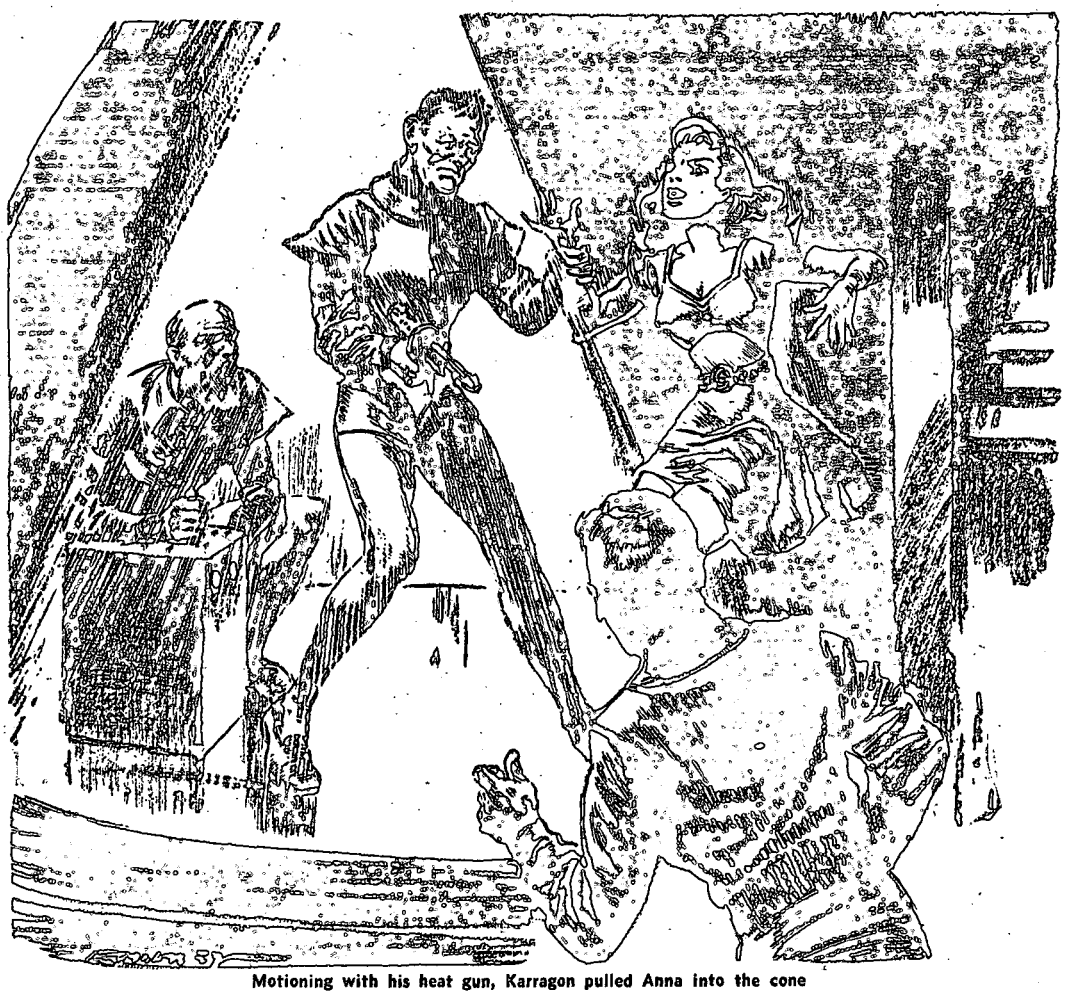

Motioning with his heat gun, Karragon pulled Anna into the cone

DELVERS IN DESTINY

By FREDERIC ARNOLD KUMMER, Jr.

A Conquest-Mad Dictator of the Future Flees Back into Medeival Days—and Finds He Cannot Control His Fate!

THE little helicopter raced southward, her motors whining under the lash of atomic power. Karragon, a grim smile on his brutal, sardonic face, glanced at the radar dials. Somewhere in the darkness behind him, so the radar indicated, the pursuing 'cepters clung to his trail.

But Flane's men, in their heavily armored warcraft, were barely holding their own. In another hour he, Karragon, would have crossed the borders of Federated Europe. Once beyond Flane's jurisdiction he could seek allies, lay plans for the reconquest of Europe, the overthrow of the Federation.

A sudden irregularity in the beat of the cepter's motors interrupted his thoughts. Sweat beaded Karragon's brow. If the little ship failed him now, while still over Europe, he could never escape.

Desperately Karragon tugged at levers but the cepter's speed continued to drop. Firing chambers, under the fierce blast of atom-

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ic power, were burning through. His pursuers, the radar dials showed, were gaining.

All at once the atomic motors coughed to a stop. The little craft, supported by its spinning helicopter vanes, dropped lightly toward the ground.

Karragon swore helplessly. When he landed, the pursuing ships' radar would record the fact. Flane's airmen would circle until they spotted his 'ceptor, then land nearby.

The ground was rushing up to meet him now. Karragon braced himself for the shock. With a thud, a shudder, the little ship settled into soft mud.

Hastily Karragon climbed out. He was in a swamp, desolate, lonely. Here and there he could make out traces of old ruins, crumbling walls, moss-covered fragments of masonry. This, he realized, was the site of Tovne, once a flourishing town but wiped out by the Black Death in the Middle Ages. A fitting place for him to have landed, Karragon reflected sardonically. Like himself, Tovne had once been all-powerful in Europe.

A roar of circling helicopters overhead froze Karragon. Flane's men! Instinctively Karragon began to run.

He had been running only a few minutes when he saw a light ahead. A house! Hardly more than a hut, but it might be a haven. Few honest men haunted these desolate marshes. And if they were outlaws like himself, they might aid him.

Karragon raced toward the lighted window. It was open, and voices were audible. Phrases, strange to him, met his ears.

"Riemann-Christoffel tensor" . . . "Schwarzschild exterior line element" . . . "Ricci-Einstein tensor."

Cautiously Karragon moved nearer, raised his eyes to the level of the window sill.

In the center of the room—a workshop to judge from the tools and equipment—he beheld a large cone, some ten feet tall, of a solid transparent material. Its base was a solid mass of machinery. Not ponderous mechanical apparatus, but a queer maze of tubes, of wires, of oddly distorted bulbs, of fluid-filled coils.

Above this, for some six feet, the cone was empty except for a dial-filled panel, an array of switches and handles. At the top of the cone was a sort of reflector from which a purplish light poured.

Karragon had the impression that the cone was solid, that its equipment and apparatus was set in it like objects frozen in a block of ice. He experienced a queer feeling of unreality, but the distant roar of helicopter motors assured him that it was all too real.

THE three persons in the room were far different from the fugitive outlaws he had hoped to find. One was a man of about sixty, with white leonine hair and a strong, lined face. There was, somehow, an air of great nobility about him. A girl, dark-eyed and erect, bore a marked resemblance to him. Near the doorway stood a young man, lean and hawkfaced. His eyes followed the white-haired man closely as the latter spoke.

"Forget the technicalities, Jan. Believe me, I have reached my goal. Surely you know that I, Ignace Grom, would not have buried myself here in these marshes for twelve years to pursue some mad impossibility. Before Karragon swept over Europe my experiments had the backing of the Academy. But when Karragon invaded the country I fled here to the marshes, bringing Anna with me.

"Here I have completed my great work. Now that our leader, Johan Flane, has freed our nation, I can return to announce my discovery. But first I must make the final experiment, must prove my success. You are the one person in the village who has befriended us. You are a student of history. You are reputable and will verify my claims. I need your help, Jan."

Jan Macek's eyes flicked toward the glowing cone. "I am," he said, "an archaeologist. I know nothing of physics. And this talk of a door into time bewilders me."

"But it's so simple!" Dr. Grom exclaimed. "Because of the linearity of the Lorentz-Einstein transformation equations, we see that if a, b, and a plus delta t, b and delta x are an observer's apparent times and distances for two events, then delta t prime—that is, an observer's increment in apparent time associated with the two events—is given by—"

Hastily he scribbled something on a slip of paper. It read:

$$Dt = R\left(-\frac{V}{C_2}DX + Dt\right)$$

"Consequently," Grom went on, "if delta t is zero so that the two events are simultaneous, relative to an observer, then, unless they are coincident or v is zero, they are not simultaneous to another observer. Thus, simultaneity is relative rather than absolute."

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"No use." Jan Macek shook his head. "I don't understand."

"What Dad means," Anna broke in, "is that two events happening at the same time need not be simultaneous. And thus two events happening at different times may be simultaneous. Events happening a hundred years ago may be happening today as well, if we could only reach them."

"And this machine?" The tall young man nodded toward the cone.

"Is a doorway into time." Dr. Grom nodded. "We have only to enter it, to pull that lever" —he motioned toward a black-handled lever on the control board— "and we will see this country as it was five hundred years ago. You have spent hours studying the ruins of Tovne. Think, Jan! A chance to see Tovne as it was before the plague! To actually see and live history! And there is no danger. I have set the machine automatically to return in four hours. Think what this means, Jan!"

Karragon, watching at the window, shook an impatient head. The old man was mad!

Suddenly Karragon froze. The helicopters! Landing! And not five hundred yards away!

The people in the hut heard that too.

"Listen!" Anna Grom raised her hand. "Planes!"

"They're landing!" Jan Macek's lean form stiffened. "Something's up! Come on!"

With Dr. Grom and Anna at his heels, he ran out of the hut, just as three big helicopters, their vanes circling lazily, settled in the clearing. A score of soldiers, clutching heat guns, leaped out.

"Surround the house!" their leader shouted.

Dr. Grom stepped forward. "This is my house! There is no one there!"

"We saw him go in!" the man snapped. "Search the house!"

Soldiers burst into the house, guns ready. A few minutes later they emerged, shaking their heads disconsolately.

"Empty!" they shouted. "Not here!"

Abruptly the leader wheeled, pointed to Dr. Grom, Macek and Anna.

"Take these three to the village for questioning. The rest of you spread out, search the swamps. He can't have gone far! Hurry!"

Karragon had acted swiftly, instinctively, when he saw the helicopters land in the clearing. Grom, Anna, and Jan Macek had scarcely quitted the hut before he vaulted into the big room.

Wildly the erstwhile ruler of Europe glanced at the great glowing cone. The old doctor had been mad, of course, but here might be a way to escape.

Loud shouts sounded outside. Cold sweat beaded Karragon's broad face. Blindly he reached toward the cone, and miraculously his hand passed into the gleaming transparent material!

For just an instant Karragon stood still, stunned. His hand was in the crystalline, gleaming cone! The hand seemed to be without substance, only appearing solid.

Outside the hut he heard sharp orders.

"Search the house!"

Taking a deep breath, he leaped into the cone.

For a moment Karragon's senses were a blur. A queer feeling of unreality shook him. Beyond the cone everything seemed dull, vague, far away. What was it the old man had said? The black-handled lever on the control panel? Blindly Karragon groped for it, pulled with all his might.

THE mass of machinery in the base of the cone sprang into flickering life. Lights danced in the banks of tubes, crackled through the wires. The fluid in the twisted coils bubbled and seethed like a witches' cauldron. Sounds; now like the murmur of myriad voices, now like bells tolling in an in an infinite void, filled Karragon's ears.

Beyond the cone was a gray swirling cosmos, peopled with fluid smoky shadow-scenes always escaping tangible outline, and darting, dazzling lights slipping by with blinding speed. He felt like a tiny mote lost in the immensity of endless space, endless time, a plaything buffeted by terrible, primeval forces. Sick with fear, exhausted by his flight through the swamps, Karragon lapsed into unconsciousness. . . .

The purplish light, beating upon his eyes, roused Karragon. He stared about, bewildered. Then he remembered. It was no fantastic dream. The door into time was real. And outside, beyond the dazzling light was a real world, another world.

Karragon hesitated. But the burning thirst, the raging hunger he had acquired during his long flight through the marshes, spurred him on. With determination he stepped from the cone.

He was in a forest glade. Warm sunlight poured through the branches of giant oaks. A small stream gurgled nearby.

Karragon raced for the stream, quenched his thirst. The great silent woods filled him

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with uneasiness. If he only had a weapon!

A small oak sapling, straight and as thick as his wrist, caught Karragon's eye. From his pocket he drew a penknife, cut down the young oak sapling, fashioned a rude club. Karragon had hardly finished this task when he heard a rustling behind him. He whirled, gripping his club. And from the bushes emerged a small white lamb, baaing plaintively.

Karragon brought the club down with brutal force. Ten minutes later he was cooking lamb over a brushwood fire.

Replete, Karragon fished a cigarette from his pocket, lighted it. He had just taken a deep drag when he heard a voice, deep with anger, roar:

"Varlet! Rogue! You'll slay no more sheep, I'll warrant!"

Running across the glade was a shepherd, clad in a leathern jerkin, brandishing a shepherd's crook. His tanned, bearded face was contorted with anger. Karragon's improvised club lay out of reach. How could he hope to match the brawny shepherd if he had had it.

"Wait!" he sputtered. "I—I—"

As he spoke, the cloud of cigarette smoke poured from his lips.

"Beelzebub!" The shepherd's face went white. "Breathing fire and brimstone! Saints protect me!" With a cry of horror he took to his heels.

Karragon laughed. The fool! But the fellow might return with reinforcements . . .

Karragon picked up his club and retraced his steps to the glowing cone. Sight of that would halt these superstitious fools. Gripping his cudgel, he reentered the doorway to time. In a few hours it would return to his world. The doctor had said it was set automatically.

Karragon began to smile, thinly. A scheme, fantastic, almost unbelievable, began to take form in his mind. If it worked, he would no longer be a hunted fugitive. Europe—the whole world—would lie at his feet! Exultant, he stood by the cone's control panel, waiting for the automatic mechanism to transport him back to the Twenty-first Century.

* * *

The mayor of the village leaned over his desk pompously.

"My dear Dr. Grom," he said, "you must pardon the soldiers. They were not of this district. They did not know who you are."

"I understand." Dr. Grom smiled at the rotund mayor's profuseness. "Nor do I blame them. I only wish we could have given them some information about that bloody beast Karragon."

"If I had only known he was around here." Jan Macek cut in, his expression harsh. "They've found no trace of him?"

"None," said the mayor. "Unbelievable that he could have disappeared so completely when—"

The mayor's voice trailed off into an apoplectic mutter. His fat face sagged. Feebly he crossed himself.

"What has happened?" Anna Grom cried.

"It's gone—vanished before my very eyes!" the mayor muttered. "One minute it was there! The next—Pouf!"

He pointed. On the wall hung a picture frame, empty.

"What's gone?" Jan Macek demanded.

"My citation," the mayor whispered. "For my efforts in overthrowing Karragon's forces. On the finest parchment, signed by Johan Flane himself. And just then, before my very eyes, it—disappeared! Evaporated!"

"Nonsense!" Dr. Grom said sharply. "How could a parchment leave its frame?"

Shouts, cries of terror, sounded in the street outside. Jan sprang to the door, flung it open, and, followed by the others, ran into the street. Anna Grom gasped, her face a pale mask.

In the square, a great oak tree had stood for years in the square, its broad branches shading the market place. Now the tree had disappeared, vanished, leaving a great hole in the square!

"Excellency!" A frantic peasant ran up to the mayor. "The tree—the great oak! I was standing in the butcher's shop when all at once the tree outside wasn't there!"

"Standing in the butcher's shop?" the harrassed mayor roared. "In your underwear?"

The man glanced down, saw that he was clad only in his underwear.

"Holy saints!" he whispered. "It's gone! My new wool suit! But I had it on not five minutes ago! The village, it is bewitched!"

From his shop the butcher came running, his face pasty.

"Ten racks of the best spring lamb!" he shouted. "Vanished! The shoulder I was about to cut evaporated under my touch! Gone! From out of my very hand!"

"This is madness!" Jan Macek squared his shoulders defiantly. "Oak trees can't disintegrate!"

SHOUTS interrupted him. A distraught villager grasped the mayor's arm.

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"My house!" he groaned. "My house! Look!"

He dragged the bewildered mayor around the corner. There, on a side street, stood the remains of a house, no more than a heap of plaster and rubble.

"Behold!" The man was almost weeping. "Rebuilt only last month after being destroyed in the fighting! Built of the stoutest oak to last for generations!"

Other villagers were pouring into the square with tales of other houses collapsing, of clothes vanishing, of furniture, leather goods, and articles of every sort disappearing before their owners' gaze.

Jan Macek ran a hand over his forehead. Were they insane? This was impossible, a mad delirium.

"Jan!" Dr. Grom seized his arm. "We must go back to my house. Quickly! If this is what I believe it is, there's no time to lose."

"But," Anna whispered, "what COULD it be? Nothing on earth could account for all these disappearances."

"We'll see!" Dr. Grom's voice was bitter. "Come! Hurry!"

Forcing their way through the frantic crowd, they ran toward the marshes. Fallen houses blocked the streets, distraught people were already pouring from the village in panic. Occasionally they passed other great excavations where trees had once stood, but as they gained the dark fens there was little sign of catastrophe. The stunted willows and birches seemed unaffected. Now they had passed the ruins of ancient Tovno, were approaching the hut.

"Unharmed!" Dr. Grom exclaimed. "Thank heaven it was built of timber from marsh trees!"

At his urging they raced up the path.

Jan Macek, in the lead, pulled open the door of the hut, then stopped suddenly as though frozen. Seated at a desk, poring over a book from the doctor's library, was the short, powerful figure, the broad, brutal features that all Europe had learned to fear and hate.

"Karragon!" Macek's hand leaped to his pocket, reappeared clutching a heat gun. "Up with your hands!"

To Karragon, expecting only Dr. Grom and his daughter, the sight of Jan, armed, was an unexpected blow. His great plans for the reconquest of Europe seemed suddenly to fade. With desperation born of despair, he hurled the book at Macek.

The heat gun flamed but, deflected by the heavy book, it succeeded only in charring the wall. Before Jan could recover, Karragon was upon him, fists flailing furiously. The gun spun from the young archaeologist's hand. Taken off balance, he was hard-pressed to defend himself.

Driven back by the initial attack, Jan Macek shook his head clear. Cold icy rage gripped him. Disregarding the dictator's blows, Jan hurtled forward, bore Karragon to the floor. In another moment his legs were locked about his burly opponent, pinioning him.

"Hold him, Jan!" Dr. Grom cried. "I'll get the gun!"

He stooped to retrieve the weapon, but as he did Karragon lashed out desperately, clutching at the old doctor's ankle. Grom toppled forward onto Jan.

Under the impact, Jan relaxed his grip. In a flash Karragon wriggled free, lunged for the gun. Seizing it he whirled to face his three opponents.

"Against the wall!" he growled. "Quick!"

Bleakly they obeyed.

"So, Doctor"—Karragon was saturnine—"you returned sooner than I had expected. Permit me to congratulate you on your invention." He nodded toward the cone. "It is unbelievable—miraculous!"

"It works?" Dr. Grom leaned forward, eyes glowing.

"Completely." Karragon smiled sardonically. "I spent a most instructive four hours in the Middle Ages while Flane's men were searching for me." He pointed to his club, lying on the floor. "That stout stick was an oak sapling five hundred years ago."

ANNA GROM noted the dried blood on the cudgel and shuddered.

"Not human blood." Karragon laughed drily. "Merely that of a sheep which satisfied my hunger."

"A sheep, and an oak sapling!" Dr. Grom's face was a tortured mask. "Jan—Anna, don't you see? Hundreds of other oak trees were descended from this sapling! Thousands, tens of thousands of sheep had that lamb's blood in their veins. But Karragon killed this oak tree before it could attain maturity, killed the lamb before it was old enough to reproduce. Therefore the offspring of both tree and sheep could not exist! In two simple actions he has changed Destiny! That's why those trees vanished, houses collapsed, woolen clothes disappeared!"

"Exactly." Karragon nodded. "I did not

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realize what I had done until I turned on your radio, Doctor. As it happens, the oak trees of old Tovno were noted for their strength and straightness. Seeds, acorns, were exported all over Europe. So, too, with the sheep of this district, prized for their heavy coats of wool. I have been reading history, you see." He motioned to the book he had thrown at Jan. "But perhaps you'd be interested in learning what a potent weapon your door into time can be." Still keeping them carefully covered with the heat gun, he snapped on the small radio. On the television screen an announcer's drawn face appeared.

"—unbelievable series of events," he was saying. "Reports are pouring in from every quarter of Europe, even from other continents. Warsaw—numerous houses collapsed, disappearance of articles ranging from furniture to paving blocks. Moscow—the disappearance of vast amounts of woolen clothing leads authorities to fear many will suffer next winter. Stockholm—numbers of lives were lost through drowning when small river craft fell apart or vanished altogether. Turkey—many sheepherders are ruined through decimation of flocks. London—preliminary reports of doctor's examination of cases of fainting and weakness indicate malnutrition or actual starvation.

"It is noted that among persons who used lamb or mutton as staples of diet, this curious weakness was most prevalent. Paris—scientists are being mobilized under the leadership of eminent French physicists, to study these unparalleled events and attempt to find the cause. Strange, isolated cases, apparently outside the general pattern of events, are reported. An entire family in Greece is reported to have vanished, a number of trees have appeared, full grown, in formerly empty fields."

"Families vanishing? Trees appearing?" Jan frowned.

"Destiny, Destiny," Dr. Grom whispered. "Suppose a man of a hundred years ago were in battle and saved from a bullet by an oak tree. But if the tree could not exist, the man must have died. And he could have fathered no family. As for trees appearing, imagine a sheep trampling down some tiny sapling. But if that sheep did not exist, then the tree must have grown, been followed by others. Karragon has hopelessly snarled the threads of Destiny. Anything could happen! Anything! If I'd only realized how dangerous the time-door could be! It must be destroyed! Any act committed in the past, however trivial, can change the world."

"True." Karragon nodded. "But we will not destroy the cone, Doctor. On the contrary, I shall use it to rule the world!"

"You're mad!" Jan breathed. "How can this thing aid you to conquest?"

"Surely you must see!" Karragon cried triumphantly. "The world has had one demonstration of my power. Soon they will have another and more convincing demonstration. After that, I will give them the choice of submitting to my will or suffering even more drastic consequences. But I think my next demonstration will prove sufficient!"

"Your next demonstration!" Anna Grom cried.

"Exactly!" Karragon's eyes gleamed. "I shall show the world that force alone rules. And at the same time get rid of this Johan Flane, who calls himself President of the European Confederation!"

KARRAGON laughed as he picked up the book from the floor.

"History is your specialty, I believe." He grinned at Jan. "This book is entitled, 'The History of Democracy in Europe.' Let me show you something!"

Karragon leafed through the book, speaking harshly as he sought the desired page.

"It is well known that Flane comes from this district, that his people lived here for generations. Ah! Here we have it!" He placed the book on the table. "The girl will read!"

Anna picked up the book, read in a low voice.

"'One of the earliest Middle-European steps toward democracy took place on April eleventh, Fourteen Thirty-eight, in the city of Tovno, when Stefan Flayne, succeeding to the duchy of Tovno upon the death of his father, freed the serfs. This historic step was made public by the young duke—only nineteen years of age at the time of his ascension to the dukedom—by personal proclamation in the market place of Tovno at high noon on that eventful day.'"

"You see?" Karragon cut in triumphantly. "Tovno was only a short distance from here. And with the cone I can reach the day of the proclamation—April eleventh, Fourteen Thirty-eight. At that time Stefan Flayne was a young man, had not married or had children. One blast of this heat gun"—he fondled the weapon—"and Stefan Flayne will be blasted to oblivion. And his descendants, including that fool Johan Flane, will not, cannot, exist!"

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DR. GROM'S face went as white as his hair.

"You don't realize what you're doing! The average family of that day was four or five children! And each of them would have four or five, and so on. Even allowing for intermarriage, and early deaths, Stefan Flayne's descendants must number tens of thousands! You'll snuff out countless lives with one blast of the heat gun! Like those sheep that vanished!"

"Exactly!" Karragon laughed, "just like the sheep!"

"But any of us in this room"—Jan Macek's eyes swept the hut—"may have Flayne's blood in our veins. Even you, Karragon!"

"I'll chance it!" Karragon's smile was bleak. "My people came from Western Europe. You will set the machine for April eleventh, Fourteen Thirty-eight, doctor!"

Dr. Grom squared his shoulders contemptuously.

"You think I'd betray my country?" he demanded. "Do away with our leader, Johan Flane?"

"Suit yourself," Karragon said carelessly. "Refuse and your daughter here will meet death by the heat gun—slowly. Moreover, your notes are in this house. From them I can learn how to operate the cone, even if I cannot comprehend the principles behind it. I warn you, if I am delayed in my plan I shall not stop at Stefan Flayne. I will turn Tovno into a shambles. Remember, for each person I blast in ancient Tovno, thousands, tens of thousands of your present-day countrymen will cease to exist. On the other hand, if you operate the time-cone for me, I will see that you, your daughter and your friend here will be well treated when I assume power."

For a moment all was quiet. Suddenly Jan's voice broke the silence.

"He's got us," he muttered. "He's bound to solve the secret of the machine from your notes. And then not only Flayne's descendants, but the descendants of scores, hundreds of other citizens of old Tovno will be wiped out. Why give our lives for no purpose?"

"So you have given up the fight, Jan," Dr. Grom muttered. "Perhaps you are right. I—don't know. I'm so tired." He glanced helplessly at Karragon. "What do you want of me now?"

"Set the machine for the day of Stefan Flayne's proclamation." Karragon's eyes shone with triumph. "Make haste. We must leave at once. Those soldiers may return."

"We must leave?" Anna Grom repeated. "You don't suppose I'd be fool enough to leave any of you here?" Karragon grated. "To have a squad of soldiers waiting for the cone when it returns? Besides, I need you all. You"—he pointed to Anna—"must stay within range of my heat gun to keep your father from trying any tricks. And our archaeologist here has studied the ruins of Tovno. He will serve as our guide. To work, Doctor. The adjustment is doubtless a delicate one."

Dr. Grom calculated, compensating for the differences in the Julian and Gregorian calendars, computing the exact adjustments of the cone's machinery. Then he handed a slip of paper to Karragon.

"Here are the dial settings," he said wearily.

Karragon adjusted the dials of the control panel, motioned his two captives into the cone with a curt gesture of the heat gun as he pulled Anna into the cone. "And now to change Destiny!" Reaching forward, he pulled the black lever.

Again the cone's machinery leaped into lambent life. He and the three with him felt the surge of unleashed power, the sensation of being lost in an endless, timeless void. Lights flashed outside the cone, gray formless shadow-pictures writhed as though blown by the winds of infinity. There was a curious feeling of falling, falling through a bottomless gulf, and then a sudden jarring return to reality as the doorway into time opened once more.

Karragon drew an exultant breath.

"Out, quickly! All of you!"

His three captives stepped from the cone, gazed curiously at the forest glade. Karragon nodded in satisfaction.

"Somewhere near here there must have been a road leading into Tovno." He prodded Jan with the heat gun. "Which way?"

Jan stiffened, but his voice remained level. "If we are on the site of Dr. Grom's house," he said, "the old King's Highway should be only a short distance, that way." He pointed.

"You three go first," Karragon grunted. "And don't forget that I'm behind you with the gun."

They made their way through the forest, dark in the shade of the great oaks for which Tovno was famed, until they came to a well-traveled road, its dusty ruts and pot-holes belying the grand title of King's Highway. Looking along it, one could see the gray towers of Tovno rearing massive heads

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above the trees.

"You'll want to go to Tovno at once?" Jan suggested.

"Not in these clothes." Karragon glanced at their modern garments. "Flayne's announcement was at noon. From the shadows we should have ample time. I imagine people from all the outlying villages will be coming in to hear him. We'll wait."

THEY did not have to wait long. Shortly the sound of horses' hoofs met their ears. Around a bend in the road came half a dozen stout merchants in rich cloaks and trappings, jogging slowly toward Tovno. Karragon grinned, pressed the trigger of the heat gun. In a tongue of scarlet flame it hissed from the gun, tore up the earth before the merchants. The horses reared in terror, the faces of the burghers went white.

"Witchcraft!" one of them shouted! "Flee for your lives!"

But even as they wheeled their horses another blast of the ray, behind them, brought them to a halt.

"Off of your horses—quick!" Karragon cried. "Here, you"—he motioned to Jan, Anna and Dr. Grom—"take their cloaks and hats. Tie them up! Tightly!"

With no choice, his three captives moved toward the abject merchants, who were babbling of wizardry, and stripped them of their long cloaks, their caps. At Karragon's direction they bound the merchants with their horses' reins, carried the helpless forms into the woods. A slap on the flanks sent the horses galloping down the road. Five minutes later four figures muffled in cloaks set out toward Tovno, Karragon slightly in the rear clutching the heat gun beneath his cloak.

The great gray medieval town seemed deserted as Karragon and his prisoners entered it. Everyone had gathered in the market-place to hear the young duke's proclamation. The four cloaked figures made their way along the narrow cobbled streets toward the central square.

As they emerged from a side street Anna gave an exclamation of admiration. The scene before them was breathtaking in its picturesque splendor.

At one end of Tovno's market-place stood a massive Gothic cathedral, richly decorated, its tall cross-surmounted spire stabbing at the blue April sky. Filling the square from the cathedral to the gabled Hall of Burgesses opposite, was an excited mass of humanity, brilliant, colorful.

Peasants in their leathern jerkins, their sheepskin coats, nobles in rich velvet trimmed with fur, swords at their sides, Burghers in more somber dress, well-filled pouches at their waists and stout men-at-arms in burnished armor, leaning on their long lances. From every house hung banners, bunting and festive tapestries. From balconies and windows women watched the gala scene, their bright raiment adding color to the scene.

All eyes were fixed on the broad balcony of the House of Burgesses. Rich handings, bearing the ducal arms, were draped from the balcony, bright in the noonday sun. Upon the balcony, his well-knit figure clad in green doublet and hose, stood the young duke, Stefan Flayne. His voice, as he spoke, rang clearly through the square.

"—aware of the poverty and misery of these sometime serfs," he was saying. "No man, professing to follow the way of Our Lord, could suffer these helpless folk to remain in bondage without hope of succor."

Karragon, herding his three captives through the square, swore savagely. Short, stocky, he could not, even by standing on tiptoe, bring the heat gun to bear.

"No elbow-room," he muttered. "I'll soon clear a space!" He started to draw the gun.

"Wait!" Jan Macek whirled. "There's room on the steps of the cathedral. You can shoot from there! Can't miss!"

"Jan!" Dr. Grom whispered. "You—you'd help this butcher?"

"Peace!" a burly man-at-arms growled. "Silence when your duke is speaking!"

Pushing his way through the mass of humanity, Karragon forced his prisoners toward the cathedral. The crowd was thinner, here, having moved forward toward the House of Burgesses better to hear the duke speak.

Karragon climbed two or three of the steps before the cathedral, directing Jan, Anna and Dr. Grom to remain at the foot of the steps where he could blast them at the first sign of treachery. From his new vantage point he could look out over the heads of the crowd, bring the gun to bear on the balcony opposite without difficulty.

The great throng was silent as the duke's words rang out across the square.

"—shall no longer suffer oppression!" he cried. "Thus we—"

Karragon smiled thinly as he drew the heat gun from beneath his cloak. One quick blast would snuff out the young duke, Stefan

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Flayne. And in that moment his descendant, Johan Flane, President of the European Federation, must cease to exist. Thousands of others, too, would vanish with this one shot.

A wave of exultation swept Karragon. He was a god, he was supreme! He was master of the world's destiny! With this demonstration of his power, and with threats of further destruction, the whole world must submit to him!

Karragon—Ruler of Earth—Master of Destiny!

"—certain that freedom is the greatest of all forces and will never die!" the young duke was saying. "This is only the beginning. Other men in other ages will guard the liberties of the people with their lives. And so, confident of the wisdom of this decision, I proclaim all the serfs in these my lands of Tovno to be free!"

A roar of acclaim arose from the crowd. Karragon, standing on the cathedral steps, raised the heat gun. Anna's eyes turned from the young duke on the balcony to Karragon, her face a mask of terror. Dr. Grom squared his stooped shoulders.

"Stop him!" he cried. "Stop him!"

His voice was lost in the roar of the crowd. Eyes alight with triumph, Karragon sighted along the barrel of the gun. In another moment it would blast.

WITH savage speed Jan Macek lunged forward, throwing his weight against Karragon's legs. The killer toppled backward, the red flame of the heat gun stabbed upward toward the spire of the cathedral.

At that instant an ominous rumbling was audible above.

"Jan!" Anna screamed. "The cross!"

But Jan Macek seemed somehow to have known what was coming. Without attempting to overcome Karragon, or to snatch up the heat gun, he leaped backward, dragging Anna and Dr. Grom with him.

Nor was he a second too soon. The massive stone cross from the cathedral spire, torn from its base by the random blast of the heat gun, hurtled downward with terrible force. Anna had one glimpse of Karragon, his face contorted in terror, arm upraised as though to ward off the tons of stone, and the steps of the cathedral were obliterated in a cloud of dust, a heap of rubble.

For a long moment the crowd stood stunned with terror, and this moment Jan Macek put to good use. Calling to Anna and her father to follow, he raced toward a side street.

The three fugitives had barely gained the side street when a shout went up from the great assemblage.

"Devils! Wizards! Witchcraft!"

In a burst of frenzied anger they set out in pursuit, serf and noble, merchant and man-at-arms.

Jan Macek's study of the ruins of Tovno stood him in good stead now. Dodging through street and alley, he led the way unerringly to the main gate. Behind them, forgetting all fear of witchcraft at the desecration of their cathedral, the townspeople swept on in pursuit.

Dr. Grom was finding the pace difficult. His breath came in gasps as he staggered onward. Anna glanced over her shoulder, saw a group of burly, bearded warriors round a corner. Their hoarse shouts echoed through the narrow, overhanging streets. Once or twice bowstrings twanged and feathered shafts flashed by them. But their pursuers' aim was hasty and the arrows glanced harmlessly off of the stone walls of the houses.

"Quick!" Jan Macek cried. "Horses! By the gate!"

Half a dozen richly caparisoned horses stood tethered by the gate. As Jan raced toward them, a brawny, broad-shouldered groom ran forward, tugging at his dagger.

"Touch yonder horses," he growled, "and by my faith I'll run ye through!"

Jan's fist lashed out, landing with jarring force on the man's chin. Without a word, the big groom slumped to the ground.

"Mount!"

Jan snatched up the man's dagger, cut the horses' tether. He swung into the saddle, helped Anna and Dr. Grom to mount. But precious moments had been lost. Several strapping men-at-arms were all but upon them, swords gleaming in the sunlight.

Jan wheeled the remaining horses about, slapped them sharply. Leaping forward, the three riderless horses plunged into the crowd of pursuers, bowling them over like ten-pins.

"Now! Quickly!"

Jan set his horse galloping over the drawbridge, his companions close behind.

It was a wild ride along the dusty King's Highway, with the wind roaring past their ears and the horses' hoofs drumming on the dry hard ground. The forest, the great trees, and then they burst into the grassy glade where the glowing purple cone stood like a lambent spear-point thrusting up through

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the green forest moss.

"Ah!" Dr. Grom's eyes lit up. "No one's touched it! Hurry!"

They leaped from the horses, entered the cone. As Dr. Grom adjusted the dials, Jan heard the sound of thudding hoofs, ringing shouts. Then Dr. Grom pulled the black lever and the descent into the abyss of time shook their senses. . . .

The hum of machinery stopped. Anna, stepping from the cone, gave a cry of joy at sight of the familiar room in the hut.

"Thank God!" she whispered. "It's been like some terrible nightmare. The people of the past—and Karragon—" She turned to Jan Macek. "If it hadn't been for you, Jan, Karragon would have truly been the master of Destiny. He could have controlled the world!"

"I wonder," Jan said slowly. "I wonder."

"What do you mean?" Dr. Grom looked up sharply. "He proved it. Any act committed in the past, like that oak tree or the lamb he killed, could change the destiny of the world. And if you hadn't prevented him from killing the young duke he would have changed it."

"True, Karragon changed Destiny twice." Jan nodded. "But in the end, Destiny was stronger than he. Look!" He picked up the history book Karragon had been reading. "Here's where he read about Johan Flane's ancestor freeing the serfs. But he overlooked one thing. A footnote at the bottom of the page. Read it, Anna."

The girl took the book, wondering, read aloud.

"'A curious legend of the time relates how a demon from the pit and a group of his henchmen appeared at the time of the proclamation and attempted to kill the duke. However, a bolt of lightning struck the tower of the Tovno cathedral and the demon was crushed by the falling cross of the cathedral while his henchmen vanished in a burst of purple flame.'"

"Unbelievable!" Dr. Grom exclaimed.

"Destiny won in the end—triumphed over the man who thought himself master of Fate." Jan nodded somberly. "For each man meets his destiny even though he must travel back five hundred years to fulfill it. Karragon had an 'Appointment in Samarra.' Even though Time was his servant, Destiny was *too strong for him.*"

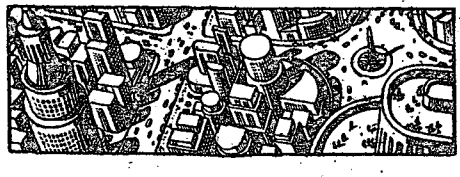
FOR a long moment there was silence in the room. Then, silently, Dr. Grom began to heap bundles of notes, stacks of paper filled with intricate calculations on the floor.

"Perhaps, too, it was destined," he said, his eyes bitter, "that I should destroy the thing to which I devoted my life."

"Dad!" Anna Grom sprang to his side. "You can't!"

"Hush, child." Her father stooped, touched a match to the heap of papers. "I have done more than most men, after all. I have seen my life's work succeed." He stood watching the flames spread rapidly. "Let us go now. There will be no more tampering with Destiny."

But as they took the path to the village, Dr. Grom paused, glanced back at the blazing hut with the look of a man whose life has turned to ashes at his touch. He was glad that Anna and Jan, arm in arm, heads close together, could not see the bitterness of his expression. And he wondered, as he followed the two young people along the path, whether it had all been so ordained by Destiny.



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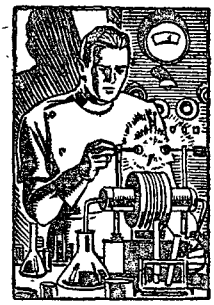

WONDERS OF WAR

The Role of Science in Combat on All Fronts

TEN-THOUSAND HORSEPOWER GAS TURBINES FOR PLANES DUE IN DECADE—Gas turbine engines for aircraft up to 10,000 horsepower are predicted by G. W. Vaughan, president of Wright Aeronautical Corporation. In the high-power range, the gas turbine has many advantages, Mr. Vaughan says. It offers large savings in weight and fuel consumption for long range, high-altitude operations.

On a giant future air transport, the gas turbine engine may mean a saving up to four tons over present engine types, permitting 40 more passengers to be carried, or four extra tons of cargo. Its use is expected to lower materially passenger fares and cargo rates.

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NEW MORTAR CAN BE FIRED FROM SHOULDER—*Going the Jap knee-mortar (which will break your knee) one better, Melvin M. Johnson, Jr. of the noted arms concern has built a shoulder mortar which can fire regular trench mortar ammunition with little recoil. The muzzle-loading barrel slides within an outer tube, is cocked before loading by a soft steel spring, which is released by the trigger, thus counteracting the recoil. Most of the kick is taken out of the piece.*

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MAGNETIC TAILWIND INCREASES RANGE OF AMERICAN WARPLANES—A new instrument called a "magnetic tailwind" is giving our fighter and bomber pilots an added hundred miles of flying range by adjusting the engines to achieve maximum fuel economy, according to Westinghouse engineer Bernard F. Langer.

The instrument consists of a metal sleeve and coil assembly encircling the propeller shaft. As the propeller shaft twists under varied air pressures, a magnetic set-up between shaft and sleeve reports such changes to an instrument on the pilot's panel, enabling him to make necessary adjustments in the feathering of the blades.

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LIGHT USED TO FASTEN RIVETS—*Strong light in a concentrated focus is used to fasten rivets in a unique device patented by M. B. Leskin of Los Angeles. Explosive airplane rivets are today operated by touching the charged head of the rivet with a hot soldering iron. In the new device, a beam of light, focussed to a sharp point by a lens, is substituted for the hot metal. Quicker results and greater safety for green workers are among advantages claimed for it.*

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SELF-VENTILATING MACHINE-GUN—A machine-gun that uses its muzzle blast to draw cooling air over its radiation fins has been designed by Charles S. Brown of Syracuse. The fins are arranged like threads of a giant screw around the barrel, within a perforated jacket. The jacket projects a few inches beyond the muzzle, with steeply arranged spiral blades that set up a suction when the muzzle blast rushes past them. This draws air through the jacket perforations and over the radiating fins.

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TWO NEW EXPLOSIVE BULLETS—*Patents have recently been awarded to two new types of explosive bullets. One, devised by R. N. Nelson of Black River Falls, Wisconsin, has a loose base portion, held in position by a washer of easily melted metal until it is fired. When the washer is thus disposed of, the base is free to plunge forward on impact, striking a primer and detonating the charge.*

The other, joint invention of W. T. Moore of Laverne, Oklahoma, and W. E. Thibodeau of Cleveland has, behind an armor-piercing nose, an hour-glass, detonator-filled cavity with a ring-shaped striker at its waist. On impact, this striker moves forward with sufficient force to cause the explosion.

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LINK TRAINER INVENTOR CREATES SYNTHETIC SKY FOR NAVIGATORS—A star-studded synthetic sky for use in training plane navigators is the latest invention of Edwin A. Link of Binghamton, New York, deviser of the famed Link Trainer for pilots. In his more recent discovery, the pilot sits in a replica of a navigator's place on a bomber. Over his head is a dome-shaped canopy with pin-points of electric light to represent the stars.

By a series of electric controls at the command of the instructor, this artificial sky can be set for any hour of the night, any season of the year, at any latitude and longitude on earth, at any degree of brightness. To make the illusion more complete, a series of motions of his seat and desk simulate the motions of a plane in flight.

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NEW ACK-ACK TURRET—*Anti-aircraft guns as at present mounted on war and merchant ships usually have at best a rather sketchy shield in front. Casualties among the crews in a hot action are apt to be high. Therefore, H. M. Pflager of St. Louis has devised a completely enclosed turret, on which he has received a recent patent. It is in the shape of a hemispherical bowl, with a slot through which the gun or guns may be fired. The whole effect is like the dome of a small observatory.*

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Suddenly images of Mark Grayson began to flash from him

MARK GRAYSON UNLIMITED

By POLTON CROSS

Defying the scorn of fellow scientists, Dr. Grayson builds a strange device that sends his image marching on!

AS the closest friend of the late Dr. Mark Grayson, I feel that I am called upon to relate the full details of his amazing experiment. I cannot stand idly by and hear him referred to as a lunatic who finally made a mysterious exit from his prison cell, because I knew him to be one of the most brilliant, though maybe misguided, scientists of our time.

From early college days when we had used to room together he had always been interested in interatomic physics, with particular leanings towards Schrodinger, and Heinsberg with his Principle of Indeterminacy. What exactly he gleaned from the treatises and theories of these two great scientific thinkers I did not discover until later years—and then I did it with a vengeance!

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After college was over our ways perforce parted and I heard nothing of Mark for many years. I married, settled down to quite a thriving practice as attorney in New York. Then one day I found that he was in the news—and none too pleasantly either. Apparently he had been ridiculed by the Association of Science for setting forth some new theory connected with the electron. In the report I read of the meeting it was pretty clear that Mark had had the worst of it and as a gesture of protest had resigned his position as Professor of Interatomic Physics to the Association.

Just about like old Mark! Ridicule was the one thing he had never been able to stand, and evidently he had not altered his views much in the passing years. Hearing about him, though, brought old memories back to me and so I wrote him a letter, asking the newspaper to forward it to him. I made a point of sympathizing with him but I also admitted that owing to my limited scientific knowledge I had no idea whether he had been right or wrong. Back came his answer very shortly—his address showed he was living now on Long Island—and it was typical of him:

My dear Arthur—

It was a delight to hear from you again, and even better to have your sympathy. I do not need it, though. It should be given to those dolts in the Association. I verily believe they do not know the difference between an electron and a piece of cheese! Why don't you come over to my place for a few days and renew the friendship? Maybe I can explain to you how monumental a thing it is to be able to detect an electron for the first time in scientific history.

Always yours sincerely,
Mark Grayson.

When I showed the wife the letter she decided to pay a visit to her sister, and it being a fairly quiet period in the city I took time out and went over to Long Island to see what exactly Mark was getting at.

OBVIOUSLY he had made plenty of money, anyhow. His home was a truly beautiful place, and adequately staffed by a very immobile manservant and an even more immobile housekeeper. I found later that they were husband and wife, and deaf-mutes. Evidently Mark was taking no chances on his secrets traveling elsewhere.

Mark himself was well enough. He was three years my senior, but work and worry had made him look a good deal more than that. His wild, disorderly hair was streaked prematurely with gray, his small, energetic form was even thinner than when he had been a youth—but there was no doubt that the creative fires of energy still burned within him. He moved and talked swiftly. His quick blue eyes darted inquiry and challenge alternately. He was what the novelists would call a restless, highly intellectual soul with no time for trifles and even less for derision.

I arrived in mid-afternoon and until eight in the evening we exchanged notes of the passed years and recalled the happy things we had done. No word about science escaped his lips. He had remained a bachelor, I think, because his work had kept him too preoccupied to admit of him even looking at a woman, let alone marrying one.

Then, suddenly, without any inducement on my part, he came to the matter I was wondering about. It was after dinner, when I had my pipe going comfortably and he sat chewing a short cigar.

"What do you know about the electron, Arthur?" he asked me, standing with his back to the library fire. "You are an attorney and an intelligent man. I ask you because I don't want to waste time explaining something you may know already."

"Always in a hurry, aren't you?" I smiled. "Well, all I know about an electron is that it is—I think—the smallest particle of electricity."

"The deplorable uselessness of education!" he groaned, raising his hands deprecatingly. "Obviously I shall have to start from the beginning if you are ever to understand what I am getting at. Just come along with me, Arthur, and I'll open your eyes."

Rather amused at his general air of impatience, I followed him out of the room to his private laboratory, and then stood for a moment or two looking round on instruments and apparatus I could never hope to understand. He perched himself on a stool, and now he was amidst these weird creations of his genius he looked really at home.

"An electron has so far only been a theory—or better still a probability," he said, his eyes fixed on me. "No, no, don't put your pipe out! There are no explosives in here, and you'll need it to help you think."

I relighted it and squatted down on an empty crate opposite him.

"One of the big stumbling blocks to scientific progress has been the inability of man to say that the electron is either here or there," he went on. "Until I studied the problem we knew that the electron, while obeying the mathematical laws of waves and ripples, was also a particle. But it could not be placed. It existed somewhere within a wave group, but that wave group was indefinite in extent. It had no sharp limitation. It just trailed off into surrounding space, even into other dimensions. For all we knew it might extend into infinity. So far all we have known is that the electron exists, but that its exact position is purely a probability in the equation of waves."

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"You're going pretty deep, Mark," I said, pondering. "But go on—I'll try and follow you."

"You recall that I used to study Heinsberg a lot? He outlined the Principle of Indeterminacy—that it is impossible to know both the position and velocity of an electron at a chosen moment. Measure one and the other changes immediately. Since both factors are necessary to an absolute deduction it looked as if Man would never be able to metaphorically put his finger on the electron's position. Of course, approximate deductions could be made by the very reason of the electron's area of waves being so inconceivably small. But science does not like things to approximate, Arthur. It demands incontestable fact."

Mark paused for a moment, drawing at his cigar. Then he gave a rather cynical grin.

"I found out how to extend the area of an electron wave," he commented. "Instead of allowing the waves to be infinitesimal and shading off into space or other dimensions, I devised electrical equipment reacting directly on the subatomic waves of matter. The result is that I can extend the wave area of an electron indefinitely, and more than that! The strain produced by extending these waves produces a definite reaction in one exact part of the extended wave. In that exact part we find—the electron! I believe, had I decided to finish the subatomic microscope I had in mind, it would have been possible to view the electron as one would a planet through a telescope. But I am not going on with that idea—not now."

A HARD note had crept into his voice and I glanced at him in surprise.

"But why not?" I exclaimed. "It would surely be the greatest achievement of your career?"

"You remember how I was treated by the Association?" he asked bitterly. "Their attitude is why I have called an end to my experiment. The Association was of the opinion that my discovery was absurd—that years of experiment had served to turn my head! Far from them agreeing to look into my findings, or perhaps helping me to finish off the finer details of the discovery, they laughed me to scorn. Prejudice still exists, Arthur, even in these days. For that very reason I am going to have my revenge on them—on everybody, on this whole stupid planet! You can't laugh at science and get away with it."

The change in his manner rather startled me for a moment. I had always known him to be a pretty erratic sort of fellow, with perhaps a good share of that curious vindictiveness that sometimes goes alongside great genius, but here something ugly was cropping up. It was in every line of his bearing.

"What more details could be needed to such an experiment?" I asked quietly, trying to keep him on the straight track.

"Plenty! You see, I was handicapped at the Association because I was not able to give a concrete demonstration of my theory. To have done that would have produced unpredictable results. You see, Arthur, this extension of electronic wavelength automatically crushes—or at least telescopes—the wavelengths of the electrons immediately surrounding them, and the effect would be progressive. It would be rather like a railway siding. You have seen how a truck is shunted, and how perhaps a hundred trucks all jolt after the first one has been shoved by the locomotive? That is the same effect in principle.

"To extend one area will mean a progressive jolting of electronic waves in all directions from the source of the disturbance. Now, an electron wave has a range which may pass into infinity—which means, into the greater macrocosm of our universe. It also operates, as Schrodinger told us, in three dimensions. But two electrons operate in six dimensions, three in nine, and so forth. Can you for a moment grasp the bewildering complexity of one electron with its wavelength held out in indefinite stress for maximum distance? An area would be disturbed all around it and the very structure of space and matter would be shifted!"

"In that case," I said, looking at him fixedly and thinking hard, "it might mean the end of the world!"

"It would!" he said, grinning. "Or at least it would, if I know my scientific facts. What's needed is careful experiment to render such a possibility impossible. I have not enlarged an electron wave yet, but I know I could do it. It might take me many years to find a way of isolating this freak wave to prevent a wholesale disturbance, but for this the Association is not prepared to wait. They wanted results immediately. Because I had to refrain from giving them, I—well, I walked out."

"Then you are going to complete the problem on your own?" I asked.

He stubbed out his cigar, and got off the stool. Coming over to me he regarded me steadily.

"No, I am not!" His voice was deadly quiet. "I realise that if science in this day and age cannot credit the word of one of its most famous members, it is time that such science and the devotees of it be destroyed! I am going to extend the area of an electron wave and consequences be hanged!"

I got up quickly and caught at his arm.

"But you just said it would be dangerous!" I protested.

"That it would, perhaps, destroy the world?" he went on. "Yes, that's exactly what I believe it will do. But don't you see, I

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will have proved that I am right! I'll have proved I can extend the wave of an electron. If it does not destroy the world it will mean that the area is there ready to view once a subatomic microscope is prepared. I shall have provided the proof. If it *does* destroy the world—well, I'd sooner lose a mighty discovery and my own life in a cataclysm than have a lot of fools grinning at me!"

"Look here, Mark, you can't do this!" I said firmly, holding on to him. "You are only looking at it from your own viewpoint. You are bitter and vindictive, like you used to be at school when old Haldane said you dreamed too much. I steered you right then, and I'm going to now. You can't do this thing!"

MARK stared at me a moment. His face hardened, became ruthless.

"I can—and I'm going to," he answered steadily. "I asked you to come here so that you can be a witness to my actions. I shall need proof if my experiment is successful and the world still stays in place afterwards. . . . I'm not mad, you know," he added seriously.

No, he was not mad—not in the accepted sense, anyway. But he was consumed with mortified rage that anybody should dare to question his genius. Amazing though it was, it seemed I had on my hands the unenviable job of trying to save a whole universe from his too clever hands.

I released him and stood trying to think things out, my mind running round the idea of physical violence. He left me and walked across to a complicated switchboard controlling many massive and unfamiliar instruments.

"This is my electron-wave extender," he said. "It reacts on the subatomic waves. The energy it generates strikes into the densest part of the electron waves. By this means they do not shade off into infinity but are built up in intensity until they have the same strength as the source. Since electrons are everywhere, be it matter or space, it simply does not signify where I apply the energy. But for the sake of accuracy it might as well be a fixed point."

He turned aside and picked up a small sealed ampule. It looked to be empty. Gently he set it down on the big circular plate immediately within the range of his queerly fashioned projectors.

"This ampule is filled with hydrogen gas," he explained. "If you remember your physics you will recall that it is the least dense substance in our material Periodic Table, and therefore the easiest one to deal with in the search for an electron—granting there ever is a search later on."

He began to fiddle with switches and controls, and all of a sudden it occurred to me what he was planning to do while I simply stood and watched. I acted instantly! Lunging at him, I caught his arm just as he threw the master switch. He staggered backwards and fell, half sprawling, across the flat metal plate where he had laid his ampule of hydrogen. For a second or two he just lay there, dazed, then I hauled him up again, pushed him into a chair and snapped off the master switch I had seen him operate.

"You are not going to do this thing," I declared grimly. "Not even if I have to beat the daylights out of you to make you see reason. Later on you'll thank me, too."

He sat there looking at me, glowering in fact—then gradually the light died out of his eyes and he got to his feet.

"I wonder if you realize something?" he said slowly. "I fell on that plate right in the area of that energy of mine! It hit me—all over! What I had intended for the hydrogen-sample reacted on me instead. I wonder what will happen?" he finished, pondering.

"Nothing," I assured him. "You weren't under the influence long enough for anything to happen."

He did not say anything for a moment, then he gave a little shrug.

"Just chance that it happened that way," he shrugged. "It might prove to be interesting, later on."

I could plainly see that whatever danger there might be did not distress him in the least. He was true scientist enough to be always interested in the unusual, even if he was the victim.

"Let's get back to the library," I urged him. "You need to rest up a bit. Too much work and too much ridicule haven't done you any good, you know."

He smiled and then nodded, but though he said nothing I could tell that some deep thought or other was back of his mind. . .

The following day, much to my annoyance, I received an urgent telephone call from home requesting my presence at the office right away for an important legal case—so, just as I had been getting interested I was forced to take my leave of Mark and plunge forthwith into the intricacies of a criminal action.

He parted from me cordially enough, but I noticed an enigmatic smile about his lips as he shook hands. It was the smile of a man who knows something tremendous and won't speak about it. Then, back in New York, with all the curriculum of legal work around me, I soon forgot all about Mark and his amazing doings.

For a week anyway—then one evening I was working late in my office when I saw somebody standing before me at the desk. For a second of two I questioned the credibility of it because I had locked the door to

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insure privacy and the window was thirty-five stories up. Yet there he was—Mark Grayson, smiling cynically, his hair disordered, and his body having a curiously transparent quality.

"Mark!" I ejaculated, astounded, getting up and stretching out my hand in greeting. "How are you? How did you get in?"

THEN, in a flash he was gone! I blinked, rubbed my eyes, then went over to the switch and put the lights on. So far I had only had the desk lamp in action. He had disappeared all right.

I was not exactly frightened, just puzzled. I am not a believer in ghosts, but I do think there is something to premonition and prevision. Suppose he had died at the self-same moment and that I had had a pre-death visitation? Immediately I reached for the telephone. His voice answered me promptly enough.

"You saw me?" he repeated, as I explained matters. "Well, maybe you need your eyes tested. Or else. . . " He stopped and I guessed he was thinking hard. "Sort of transparent?" he asked pensively.

"Seemed so—like a fairly solid ghost. I could just see the wall through you—or it, or whatever it was."

"Mighty interesting, because at the exact time you've mentioned I was thinking about you," he said. "I must study this over carefully. It may be the first reaction of that accidental fall I had into the midst of that energy machine of mine."

"You are feeling well?" I asked anxiously.

"Never better. And I'm not going to destroy the world, so don't you worry. Your common-sense lecture did me good. I mean to find a way to produce electronic isolation. See you again."

I rang off, sat thinking for a moment or two, then shrugged my shoulders. If there was a scientific explanation for it I certainly did not know what it was. . .

As it transpired, though, this was only the beginning. Two more days went by, then the newspapers published a full column on Mark Grayson. When I read it I found it had been culled from the experiences of quite a lot of different people in widely separated parts of the country. Each person interviewed reported having seen a vaguely transparent figure resembling Mark Grayson. Sometimes he had been observed within five minutes, in places as much as two hundred miles apart. Some witnesses, though perhaps they were drawing on their imaginations, declared that he had merged into two and even three persons, all identical. This had happened while the witnesses were watching him.

To me, especially, it was puzzling, and I wished my legal work over so that I could pay him another visit. The first moment I was free, I hurried to Long Island and found him, apparently not disturbed, though he did not look as well as he had on my earlier trip.

"Glad you've come," he said, in that offhand way he had, when we were in his laboratory. "These happenings are rather alarming if you don't understand them. As it happens I do, partly. You know, I've been having the devil of a time with newspaper men. They have been here pestering me. It appears that I am rapidly becoming a public nuisance. All I can do is deny everything, and that does not improve my case very much. If I am not careful I'm likely to find myself in an ugly mess."

"But how in the world do you account for these appearances of yourself in so many widely differing places?" I demanded. "You could never have been to such places. Time and distance would not permit it!"

"I think I have unlocked a door of science which I never intended to touch," he said, thinking. "And it may mean the end of me. It's likely the extension of an electronic wavelength reacts differently in living organism to what it does in inert matter. A piece of iron, for instance, would transmit disturbance to all surrounding matter and bring about a general cataclysm, but organic, or living matter, is different. The effect is transmitted through that body until it is dissipated!

"Mind force enters into it, too. Living matter is at the behest of the mind, as we know, but so far only the living body itself has responded to the mind. In my case it is different. By accidently falling into the area of that energy transmission I enlarged the wavelength of a whole mass of my electrons indefinitely, displaced the energy thereof, if you will. The result is that confusion has entered into my matter make up. The displacement of the wavelengths has produced an emittence of energy, and each time the energy passes away it has to resolve itself. That is electric law. The resolution takes the form of a complete image of me, a thin, attenuated image which travels immediately to the spot I happen to be thinking of at the time, or somewhere in the immediate vicinity. Mind is at the back of it all the time because mind is at the back of the parent body.

"But there is a price for it, Arthur. With each emittence of energy, as more electrons extend their wavelengths and pass away from my physical make-up, I lose substance and weight. Mind I cannot lose, because that is an eternal quality."

I WAS bewildered by what he had told me. "I don't half grasp all this," I said. "Where is it going to end?"

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"I don't know," he muttered. "I believe it has only just begun. A series of thinly spaced electron setups part from me at intervals and become ghosts of Mark Grayson. There are tens of thousands of Mark Graysons remaining in my make up yet. As I told you, one electron takes three dimensions; two, six; three, nine—and so on progressively. In time I imagine that my images will not only be hurtling to different parts of the earth but into other spaces, dimensions, times, and worlds. In other words I am being radiated into infinity and multiple-infinity. Maybe it is a just judgment for the plan I had to destroy the world and perhaps the universe."

"But for me it would never have happened," I protested. "I pushed you onto that plate!"

"And by so doing you perhaps saved the world." He shrugged. "What's the difference? It happened, and I'm prepared to abide by it."

That was how the m tter stood with him. There was not much I could do about it, anyway, not being a particularly good scientist. But the interest of this amazing phenomenon had gripped me so hard that I sent over a call to the wife and told her I was stopping with Grayson for a day or two as he was not very well. By this decision I entered into the most astonishing few days any man ever lived.

At intervals—intervals which increased in frequency as time passed—I actually saw this parting of electronic energy from Mark Grayson. It was rather like one of those trick shots in a movie where a dreamer gets out of himself and walks about.

Suddenly, even while talking to me, or having a meal, or seated in a chair, an image of Mark would flash out from him in a hazy glow, go right through wall, floor, or ceiling and vanish. All he did was smile wryly, recall exactly what he had been thinking about at that moment, and sure enough the image was later reported to have been seen in that exact spot.

At first this used to happen at intervals of three hours. Then as the weird progressive change built up within him, as the energy he had absorbed extended more and more multi-thousands of electron wavelengths inside him, it happened more repeatedly, until in two more days as many as twelve images parted from him in thirty minutes. In some cases they were in triplicate. I completely lost count of how many Mark Graysons went out, but we learned plenty from the radio and newspapers. Some of the reports were pathetic, some startling, and others downright ludicrous.

In a far Western state a woman dying of cancer had been praying for a vision to restore her. At that identical time some quirk of Grayson's mind had sent an image right into her bedroom, a place he had merely envisaged in thought. The woman had seen the vision and been instantly cured.

In another case a famous banker had demanded action by the police because Mark had appeared through the closed doors of a secret conference and heard all the details of a great international finance deal. In yet another instance an image had appeared in England where a high-pressure estate agent had been trying to sell a castle to a wealthy traveler. The traveler had refused to buy because there was no sign of the reputed ghost. A Mark Grayson transparency glimpsed in the aged cloisters had made that agent a richer man.

Silly, trivial things, but they give an idea of what distances the parting electrons of Mark Grayson traveled, distances no longer trammeled to the ordinary limits of an electron wavelength. Then, always the true scientist, he began to see that undisciplined journeying by his images are useless. He might as well do something with them. For, as he told me, he knew what they saw and felt by reason of the mind reaction they carried. Because of this, he gradually became less sure of himself. As the images increased to the multiples he inevitably received multiple impressions, was in some cases aware of being in half a dozen places at once.

But he was determined to make something of his doom, for that was inevitably what was coming. As he got to the place where the images were so numerous they were not confined to three dimensions but to six, nine, twelve, and multiples of three for every electron, he went literally a-roaming, and each time he told me what he had seen and done. I can only report this as he explained it.

He passed into the sixth dimension and found it populated as freely as our own three, but by beings who were purely mathematical because of their environment. He wandered into the sealed underworld of Mars and found it truly dead, walked the plains of steaming Venus, wandered across blazing and frozen Mercury. He had in fact the supreme chance of all creation, the ability to roam as an actual thought-projected image into all the places locked so far to science.

HE told me of his journeyings through the hottest suns, of his visits to the centers of blazing Sirius and Antares. Then some whim changed his course. He had all Time open to him, too, as more and more electrons swept him into the multiple dimensions demanded of them.

He walked in the Cretaceous and Carboniferous Periods, saw the beginning and end of the world, established facts of history which I wrote down and stated vital facts of

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the future which only the passage of time can prove to lesser mortals. He saw ahead of us not peace and content but a world of struggle and dreadful turmoil until Man should really come to understand that all life, intelligence, power, and conception are mental and not physical.

Plainly, Mark Grayson, unlimited in number of images and unlimited by any mortal or material barrier, was for three brief weeks a god. Then he tired of his wanderings and the vast things he had learned. The terrific strain on his mental and physical makeup broke him down. Unutterably weary, for his bodily energy had decreased with every set of electrons to pass from it, he finally ceased his mental roaming and let the images go whither chance willed. In consequence they appeared here, there, and everywhere without direction. Sometimes in the city, sometimes in the country, sometimes for good, sometimes for ill—until the very complexity of his appearances and the secrets he supposedly learned caused big shots to add their complaints to that of banker Joseph Runthorne and finally the police came to investigate. I was present when they arrived. I tried in vain to convince them that my friend was ill and could not be disturbed.

He was sitting in the laboratory when they arrested him—a pale, white-haired man now, lines of weariness traced on his face.

"Do you deny, Dr. Grayson, that you have been projecting images of yourself here, there, and about?" asked the officer in charge. "Do you assert you haven't been using these images for the learning of secrets and the—er—violation of personal privacy?"

Grayson smiled wanly. "I admit the first and deny the second. Not that it matters. I have seen the beginning and end of the world, the beginning and end of space."

It was a pity he said this for it sounded crazy. It was on this ground that he was brought up for trial. I was present too, of course, as chief witness and I employed a brother lawyer of outstanding skill to defend him. But unfortunately Mark prejudiced his chances by his technical explanations.

To me, knowing him as he had been, it was quite clear that the mass of knowledge he had amassed and the energy he was still losing had caused him to lose his grip on his mind. He sounded—and maybe he was—crazy. Certainly the regular glowings of light about him which pronounced the departure of more images did a great deal to get him convicted as a criminal lunatic. He was removed to prison to await confinement in an institution for the criminally insane.

I was allowed to see him for a few minutes, and found him quite rational again. I took good care to keep my distance in the cell though, for now the glow was almost continuous. He looked as if he were painted in phosphorescence.

"I've not far to go, Arthur," he said soberly, as I sat looking at him. "The energy which began in leaps has increased to a positive continuous discharge. Life energy—electronic energy—is flowing out of me like water down a sluice. In a myriad directions, in a myriad dimensions and spaces, images of me must be flashing, appearing, disappearing, shading off into infinite dimensions we cannot even guess at. See—look here!"

He laid his hand on the bunk and for the first time I saw that it was translucent. He was becoming as transparent as glass.

"When the last scrap of energy has exhausted itself, it will be the end of Mark Grayson, and thank God for it!" he said. "You have been my true friend, so do me a favor. Tell all you know about me to the Science Association. Hand them the notes you have made. They will perhaps believe. Tell them to destroy that machine of mine. Things like this are not for Man to understand until he has learned a lot more science."

With this I had to leave for my time was up. Then, four days later, I read this in the paper under big headlines:

MARK GRAYSON DISAPPEARS!

Dr. Mark Grayson, the famous scientist, convicted recently as criminally insane and awaiting entry into an asylum, was found today to have vanished from his prison cell, and there is no sign of how the escape was effected. It is presumed that it was accomplished scientifically because there is no trace of window or door having been tampered with. The police are conducting an immediate search.

Needless to say, the police never found him, and they never will. Obviously his last scrap of energy had gone and he is at last untrammeled—or at least his great mind is.

For myself, I put his case before the association and they have promised to examine my notes, of which this is a short history, written to disprove him the lunatic he was thought to be. I say that he was a genius, but before his time. As to whether my act of knocking him on that plate saved the world or not I leave you, and science, to judge.

Not that the last of his images has even now been seen. Electronic radiations still reproduce—or at least rebound—from the subetherial waves of matter, and only last night while out with my wife we both saw a hazy image of Mark for a moment on the other side of the street, which immediately vanished. They have been reported from other parts of the world, too.

Until the last state of unbalance is overcome the world will be forced to remember Mark Grayson, and for my part I want to see that the world shall never forget him.

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A monster slowly came toward the rocket ships

NO GREATER WORLDS

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

Agonto Tenodin's rocket ship roars into outer space!

THE great rocket ship flashed through the darkness, its rear jets leaving a flaming wake that briefly lighted the universe around them for the watchers through the rear-view periscopes in the control room. Fragments of shapes so weird and immense that they were absolutely unidentifiable to the anxious, sweating group at the instrument board were shown in quickly fading panorama. Great spaces of utter, empty darkness lay between these tremendous objects.

They were exploring a strange world in this greatest of rocket flights, a world that had heretofore lain beyond the reach of the most powerful space-ships. Agonto Tenodin, captain of the ship and controller of the destinies of the six hundred men who rested or labored in its bowels, peered intently at the indicators, trying to read sense out of what they told him.

"Swing her to port—hard," he commanded, his face suddenly pale. The tele-indicator, working from the long ultra-sensitive needle-like nose of the great craft, reported a solid wall, a wall apparently without end, directly in front of the ship.

"Aye-aye, sir," said the helmsman, a young interspace stalwart whose poise was fabulous. The ship groaned as it was jarred on a right angle turn in a radius far shorter than its designers had planned for. Seconds were years as it swung, seemingly with incredible slowness.

"If we hit—if we even scrape at this speed," Agonto Tenodin thought tensely, "we'll explode from the heat of the friction." He cursed himself for having brought the great ship so far from its home port on distant Hinuphote, home planet of his species. It would be a useless achievement if the ship failed to return with reports of the experiment.

There was a sudden, jarring jolt, and for

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a moment, the captain thought all was over. But somehow they kept on, and then the voice of the chief engineer, Pzemptus Nonu, sounded scratchily on the interphone.

"Port stern rockets fused," he said calmly. "Orders, sir?"

Agonto Tenodin swore sharply. Without full rocket power, they could not hope to return home in their lifetime. If they landed, they could not take off again unless repairs were effected—at best a highly problematical procedure. Furthermore, if they landed in this world of darkness, what would they be landing on? The sharp turn had given the ship its probable death wound.

"Proceed until further orders reach you," Tenodin said, stalling for time.

It was a tense half hour later that the miracle happened—a miracle so unexpected that at first the skipper could not believe it. Ahead of them had appeared a rectangle of dazzling light, a rectangle so immense that it filled the entire sky. Yet from it came no flames, and the sensitive indicators in the ship's long nose reported no poisonous gases.

Agonto Tenodin, his face sternly set, had the ship flown right into it!

Before them lay a hard flat surface, so shiny in spots that the eyes could not bear to look at it. Far above glowed a tear-shaped sun in a smoky sky that faded to infinity. It was then that the second miracle occurred.

ON THE vast field, huddled together near its apparent center, lay a half dozen rocket ships, in size and shape almost like the one he was piloting. Agonto Tenodin could not control his astonishment. He closed his eyes, looked again through the teleport. But they were still there, streamlined hulls, long indicator noses and finned tails.

Yet he knew the ship he was in was the only one of its kind ever conceived. He sailed closer, hoping they would prove an illusion, but the other ships were as solid as his own. They meant that here at last had been discovered a kindred civilization to that of Hinuphote.

It was a cruel decision to make. Before them was the perfect landing field, a chance to make repairs and reverse course to report what they had discovered. Yet the inhabitants of this strange new world might well prove hostile, even though the fact that they had built replicas of his own ship hinted at a high degree of civilization. Also they were six to one.

But something had to be risked either way. He ordered the ship brought in alongside the others—no sense trying to hide now. Their indicators would have picked up the newcomer. It came to a stop as gently as a feather, its tough bottom bumping slightly on the strangely hard ground.

"Prepare a rocket repair crew and armed escort," Agonto Tenodin ordered. "Take ray guns and atomic power throwers." He strapped on a pair of the oddly shaped devices about his own waist.

While the repair crew went to work with feverish haste under the lash of Chief Engineer Pzemptus Nonu, Agonto Tenodin led a party of fifty warriors toward the other ships. The plain they were on was strangely arid, save for a distant tower of shimmering crystal with an oddly curved crystalline appendage branching from it perhaps a hundred feet up and disappearing into the misty sky.

No one came from the other ships to greet them. Pausing at a safe distance, Ogonto Tenodin examined them through binoculars. They were strange too, oddly chipped and battered save for their long, shiny indicator noses. Their fins, too, were made of thin flexible streamers that wavered slightly in the occasional breezes of this alien land.

He was puzzling over these odd features, as well as the absence of ports or windows of any kind in the alien craft, and their apparent lack of crews, when something horrible came out of the sky. It was a slow-moving five-headed monster of a general pinkish hue that appeared high in the sky, a monster whose thorax was twice as broad as any of the huge ships, whose immense, pillar-like body faded away into infinity.

Each of its five heads was without eyes or mouth, but seemed to be guided by some extra-sensory perception, for they moved with dreadful purpose toward the furthest of the rocket ships. Each head was topped with a shining, black-rimmed curving plate, and behind it grew dark, spiky hairs of incomprehensible length and thickness.

As Agonto Tenodin looked on, horror-struck, the five heads united on their target, picked up the immense craft as if it were a twig. A moment later the ship flashed by, far overhead, to disappear in the distance.

"Did you see that, sir?" a young under-officer asked.

"I did," said Agonto Tenodin, regaining a measure of self control. His lips were grim. Whatever this monster was, it apparently launched these alien ships for their crews. Even as he watched, it reappeared, swooped down on another ship which, like its predecessor, flashed by far above them a few moments later.

"Quick," snapped the skipper. "Order all crews back in the ship. Seal up all ports! With such a start, we can blow out the fused tubes from the interior."

"But, sir—" began the young officer.

He said no more, as a stern look from his captain quelled him. Agonto Tenodin was about to take the greatest gamble ever risked by any space traveler. . .

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"I'm going to trim you tonight, Jim," said fat Mike Barnes, eyeing the two darts he had put close to the heart of the target. For years now, he had been playing his host at the "Royal Crown" pub for the price of the last pint of bitter before closing time. He had never won yet.

"You'll have to put the other four in the second circle to do it," said Jim Colson with a chuckle and a wink to an onlooker. "And you've never been able to do that yet—not after three pints."

"Breathe that air," said another kibitzer. "What a relief to have the blarsted blackout over and done with and the windows open wide."

"Aye, 'tis a warm night," said the first watcher. "Good shot, Michael."

"A-ha! Told you so," said Barnes, revealing tobacco-stained front teeth as he grinned in triumph. But his grin faded as he barely found the edge of the target with his fourth try.

"That does you," said Colson.

"If I hadn't slipped!" muttered Barnes angrily while the others sniggered and nudged one another. Carelessly, almost savagely, the dart thrower sent the next two into the center of the target, bemoaning his ill luck the while.

"Take a look," said the second watcher suddenly. "You've still got another dart left to shoot."

"So I have!" said Barnes in surprise. "I could have sworn I'd used 'em all." Peering a bit near-sightedly, he went to the board and counted six already there. "I'll take the extra one just for luck."

"Here—no cheating," cried Colson, leaning over the bar to see the strange dart. "You've already had your throws."

BARNES glowered at the tavern keeper. "And you've had plenty of beers off me and never bought one on the house," Barnes said indignantly. There were cries of "Hear, hear!" and Colson, realizing the sentiment of the house was for his opponent, gave in grudgingly.

"All right," he said. "It's a gyp, but take your extra shot. You'll never make it anyway."

"You just watch," said Barnes. He picked up his stein from the table and fortified himself with its dregs for the ordeal. Then, carefully, he picked up the extra dart and took careful aim. It felt strangely smooth and light in his hand, but he paid it little attention as he threw it.

Straight for the inner ring and a free pint it went—until the impossible happened.

Just short of the target, the dart suddenly spurted flame, swung about on its course and, gathering momentum as it went, flew straight through the window and out into the Devonshire night outside.

"What kind of a sorry joke is this?" shouted Barnes angrily. "Colson, what did you ring in on us—a rocket?"

"'Tis a baby buzz bomb!" cried one of the onlookers. "Did you hear it sizzle as it went by? Jim, what are you doing? It's not closing time yet."

"It is for me," said the bartender, putting his house in order for the night. "I've been thinking we've all had a drop too much."

"Don't Tell Anyone Where I Am—Please Don't Tell Them Anything—"

DIRK BRADDICK looked in amazement at the beautiful young creature who had suddenly landed on Earth—right in front of his laboratory.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I—don't—know—just who I am," she said weakly.

"Then I'll tell you," said Dirk. "You are a lady spy for Atomic Power. And you've been dropped by parachute. Isn't that right?"

"I don't know. But please—hide me! Don't let them find me!"

This strange emissary from another sphere leads Dirk Braddick into a series of astonishing adventures—adventures upon which the very fate of Earth depends—in THINGS PASS BY, a gripping complete science fiction novel by Murray Leinster which will hold you breathless from start to finish!

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

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As I wondered what to do with the helmet, Billie rushed into the arena

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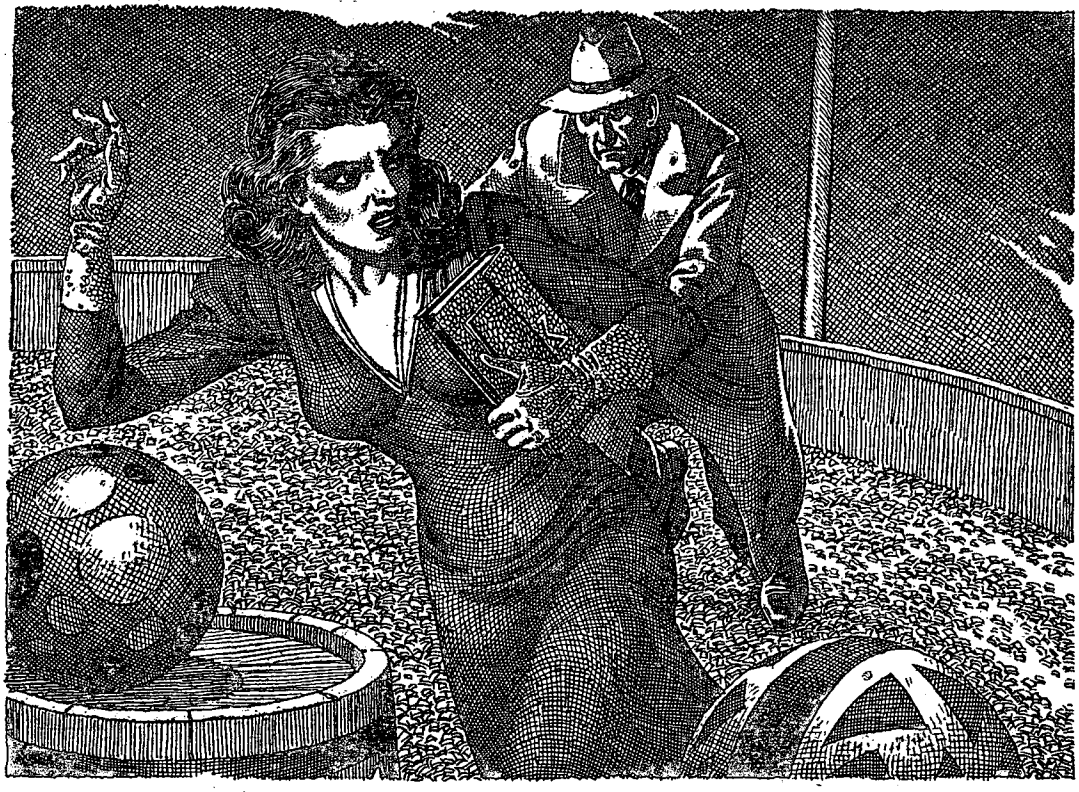

BABY FACE

By HENRY KUTTNER

When a Tough Sergeant Reverts to Infancy He Just Won't be Weaned from Fighting Mankind's Foes!

CHAPTER I

Jolt For Jerry

ANY wise mutt calling me Baby Face is going to get a sock in the puss that'll land him in 4F.

The name's Jerry Cassidy, sergeant, U. S. Marines. I tip the scale at two hundred even, and I look a lot more like Wallace Beery than Baby Sandy. I do now, anyway. There was a time, though, when this didn't hold true.

But if any lug feels like bringing that up, he'd better have knuckle-dusters handy. If Doc McKenney wasn't such a nice old man, I'd break his neck for landing me in that jam. Transference of egos, bah!

The way it happened sounds mighty strange.

I am a big, good-natured looking feller, so I suppose the Captain's wife figured it'd be safe to leave "Stinky" Dawson with me. I ran into Mrs. Dawson on Park, as I was coming out of Grand Central. She's a cute little trick, blonde and sort of muzzy around the eyes—the look that starts your floating. Anyhow she was wheeling this baby carriage along when she saw me and said hello.

"Hi, Mrs. Dawson. Hope you're well."

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"Well enough to go dancing with the Captain tonight," she told me, laughing under her breath. "It's wonderful to have him home again. You're on leave too, aren't you, Jerry?"

"I can prove it," I said. "I got my pass. And I'm sort of going dancing tonight too, down at the Rainbow. My—uh—girl friend says I'll learn how if I keep at it long enough."

Mrs. Dawson looked at my feet in a kind of dubious fashion.

"Uh-huh," she said. "How do you like New York?"

"I dunno. It isn't much like New Guinea. Billie's working till five, so I'm sort of killing time till then."

"There's not much to do on Park Avenue."

"Right," I said. "Only I know a sawbones who lives around here. Doc McKenney. He used to live in Keokuk where I come from, and I thought maybe I'd look him up."

Mrs. Dawson was biting her lip. "Jerry," she said, "I wonder if you'd do me an awfully big favor."

I said sure I would, and what was it.

"Mind Stinky for half an hour. Would you do that? I hate to ask you, but it's the maid's day out and I had nobody to leave him with, and I simply must get another dress for tonight. I—I haven't seen the Captain for so long, and—well, you know."

"You bet I'll mind the little—uh—the little fella," I told her. "You run along and take your time, Mrs. Dawson."

"Thanks so much! I won't be long. And—look! I know! I'll bring you something to take to Billie. There's some lovely lingerie I saw last week at the store."

I GOT kind of red around the collar. "L-lingerie?"

"Don't be silly, Jerry! She'll love it. Now you wait here, and if you get tired, go in that drug-store and have a coke or something. Okay?"

"Yes'm," I said, and she went off. My hands felt too big. I looked at them, and they were blushing too. Lingerie! I didn't think Billie would like it. Still, I could have been wrong. Women go for funny things.

I took a gander at the little squirt in the carriage. He was a fat, stupid-looking infant, slightly cock-eyed, and with great big cheeks that blobbed down on his shoulders. He had hands like starfish—stubby fingers sticking out in all directions—and he was trying to put his shoe in his mouth, doing a pretty good job of it. If he took after his old man, I figured he'd have a devil of a temper. So I didn't argue with him about the foot. I smoked a cigarette and looked at things.

Pretty soon Stinky started to bellow. He was lying flat on his back, waving his arms and legs around, with his eyes all squinched up. His face had turned red. His voice reminded me of the Captain's at certain times, like once when I'd got a little tight in Sydney and had a mild argument with some sailors.

Figuring he wanted his foot back, I shoved it into position, but he'd had enough of that. He turned purple and kept hollering. People were beginning to look at me. I got scared and had a mind to beat it. But I couldn't leave the kid alone.

I went into the drug-store and asked the prescription clerk what to do. He didn't know. All babies yelled, according to him, and it was good for them.

Not this baby! All of a sudden I noticed that one of his shoes was missing.

"Oh, gosh," I said, feeling sick. "The blamed little ostrich must have ate it!"

I picked him up by the feet and shook him tentative, without much result, except he roared louder than ever. A crowd was gathering, but not a WAAC, WAVE, or SPAR among them. I dithered. I kept wondering what would happen when Mrs. Dawson came back and found Stinky had strangled to death on his shoe. Court martial, anyhow. I could stand that, but—I was worried about the poor little tyke.

Then I remembered Doc McKenney. His office was only a block away, so I sent the carriage scooting like a fast jeep up Park, leaving a trail of sweat from my forehead. All the while Stinky yelled, squalled, bawled, and tooted. He was sounding off, all right.

A sailor grinned at me.

"A walkie-talkie, huh?" he said, but I had no time to sock him. I yanked Stinky out of his carriage, ran up a flight of steps, and bounced through a door labeled Doc McKenney. A nurse looked up at me, startled.

"Quick!" I said. "Get the Doc. The small fry just ate his shoe!"

"But—but—"

A door across the room opened, and I saw the Doc's familiar, wrinkled old face, with his gray hair sticking up like a cock's comb. He was ushering somebody out, but fast.

"No!" Doc was yelling. "I'm not interested. I'm not satisfied with your credentials, and I'm getting in touch with the F.B.I. immediately. Get out!"

The man, a big husky with sleepy eyes and a bristling moustache, opened his mouth to say something, and then closed it like a trap snapping shut. He was mad, I could see that. But he didn't do anything about it. He whirled and went out, with a furious glance in my direction.

"Doc!" I said.

"What? Who—well, for Pete's sake! Jerry Cassidy. Who made you a sergeant?"

I passed the baby to him. "This is life

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and death. The kid ate a shoe or something. He's strangling!"

"Eh? A shoe?"

I explained. Doc nodded at the nurse and took me into his office, a fairly big room with lots of equipment. He went to work on the baby, while I watched, scared stiff.

After a while Doc shrugged. "I can't find anything wrong."

"But he's yelling. He ate a shoe, I tell you."

THE nurse came in, with the missing shoe. "I found this in the carriage downstairs," she said. "Need help, Doctor?"

"No, thanks," the Doc said. He put the shoe back on Stinky's foot, but that didn't solve the problem. The nurse went out. The kid kept on crying.

"He doesn't look like you," the Doc murmured absently. "Well, he'll cry himself out pretty soon. What have you been doing?"

"'Course, he doesn't look like me. He's my Captain's wife—I mean his baby's Captain—oh, gosh, Doc! Do something!"

"What?"

"What's he crying for?"

"That," Doc McKenney said thoughtfully, "is one of the greatest mysteries of the ages. No one knows why babies cry. At least, why they cry when they haven't got colic, aren't being stuck by pins, or don't require changing."

"Is it—those?" I gulped.

"Well, it might be colic," he said. "Not the others. I checked up."

"I wish the little sprat could talk," I moaned. "This is awful."

The Doc perked up. "Well, I'll be—I forgot. Here, Jerry, I'll have this fixed up in a second or two. The first practical use for my Thought-Matrix Transfer. Here." He unlocked a safe, dragged out a couple of soft helmets that looked like leather, and gave me one. It had wires woven into it, though it was flexible, and there was a tiny switch over one ear.

"You mean gag the kid?" I said. "We can't do that. Besides, a handkerchief would work better."

"Shut up," the Doc growled. "I'm a humanitarian, or I wouldn't have invented the Transfer helmets. It simply changes your mind."

"I can do that by myself," I pointed out.

Doc jammed one of the helmets over my head and donned the other himself. "I'll show you," he said. "Push the switch over." I did. My head began to feel hot. There was a low humming.

Doc moved his own switch. Everything blurred for a second. Then I felt slightly giddy. The room had sort of swung around.

"Doc" I said. "You've changed!" My voice sounded peculiar. Cracked and squeaky.

Doc McKenney had changed, all right. He was a big, husky guy, with a map like a punch-drunk gorilla. . . .

I recognized that map. I saw it every morning when I shaved. Doc looked like me!

He grinned, flipped the switch, and came toward me to turn off the one on my helmet. "Take it easy," he rumbled. "We've simply changed bodies, so to speak—though not actually. It's in the nature of a remote control. The essential psych is not affected by the change, but the thought-matrix is, the basic pattern that makes up the conscious you."

"Doc!" I said. "Help!"

I had a headache, and was scared. The Doc chuckled. "All right, we'll change back. Flip your switch over again. That's it. Now—"

The room swirled. I was looking at Doc McKenney. I was back in my own body. Automatically I flipped the switch, as the Doc did, and then collapsed in a chair.

"Wow!" I said. "Magic!"

"Nothing of the sort. I've simply invented a perfect method of diagnosis. All the physician has to do is change his mind with that of the patient, and he instantly feels all the aches, pains, and symptoms of the patient. The layman can't describe with complete accuracy how he feels when he's sick. But the doctor—putting himself completely in the place of the patient—can."

"I got a headache."

The Doc looked interested. "Have you?"

I thought. "No. Funny. It's gone now."

"Ah! I've had a headache all day. Naturally you experienced it while in my body."

"It's crazy," I said.

"Not a bit. The human brain emits patterns of energy. Those patterns have a basic matrix. Ever heard of remote control?"

"Sure. What of it?" I was interested.

DOC McKenney scratched his high forehead thoughtfully.

"Transplantation of the actual brain is a surgical impossibility. But the mind itself, the key matrix, can be transferred. It has certain definite vibrationary periods, and my helmets, working on the inductive principle of the diatherm, effect the necessary change. You see?"

"Yeah," I said. "I don't want to hear any more about it. Stinky's still crying, and if you can't help me what'll I do?"

"I am helping you," Doc said. "This is it. I hadn't thought of this application, but it's beautifully logical. Babies can't explain what's wrong with them, because they can't talk, but you can. I'll show you." He took the helmet off his own head and slipped it gently on Stinky's, moving the switch as he

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did so. Before I knew what was happening, Doc had whirled on me and reached out and —and—

"Globwobble!" I said.

Something was wrong with my eyes. Things swam mistily. There was a big round blob above me—

And somebody was roaring like an organ gone crazy. With a frantic effort I uncrossed my eyes. It was Doc McKenney's face hanging over me. I felt his fingers fumbling at my head. There was a click.

The bellowing in the background kept up. My throat and palate felt soft, blobby, and peculiar. My tongue kept crawling back into my gullet. I reached out, and a fat, starfish like pink object shot up. My hand!

My stars!

"Blogobble wog wog Doc whabble gob quop!" I said, in a remarkably infantile voice.

"Okay, Jerry," the Doc said. "You're in Stinky's body, that's all. He's in yours. I'll switch you back as soon as you tell me how you feel."

This time I made more sense. I lisped a lot, though.

"Gemme ouda this! Quick!"

"Anything sticking you? After all, you want to know why the baby was crying."

I hauled myself erect somehow. To a squatted position, that is. My legs were curled up and seemed helpless.

"I feel all right," I managed to say. "Except I want back."

"No pains?"

"No. No!"

"Then it was merely temper," Doc said. "The emotions are transferred with the mind, but the sensory equipment stays with the body. The baby was just irritable. He's still crying."

I looked. My body, the body of Sergeant Jerry Cassidy, was lying on its back on the floor, arms and legs curled up, its eyes were tight shut, and its mouth open as it bawled. Great tears splashed down its—my—cheeks.

My mouth felt like I was eating mush, but I managed to tell him I wanted my own body back. My feeling was strengthened by the fact that Stinky was sucking my thumb, lying there on his back and drowsily staring up at the ceiling. At any rate, he'd stopped bawling. As I looked, his eyes closed and he started to snore.

"Well," Doc said. "He's gone to sleep. Maybe the mental transference has a soothing effect."

"Not on me it hasn't," I snarled feebly, in a quavering soprano. "I don't like this. Get me out!"

BUY WAR BONDS AND STAMPS!

CHAPTER II

Baby Has a Thirst

BEFORE the Doc could transfer me back into my own body, there was a scuffling in the outer office, and the nurse squeaked briefly. I heard a thump. The door slammed open, and three tough mugs came in, holding guns in their fists—a Webley and two small, flat automatics. The man with the Webley was the same lug Doc McKenney had been throwing out when I arrived. The lug's moustache was still bristling over the rat-trap mouth, and his eyes looked sleepier than ever. The other two were just gorillas.

"Smith!" Doc said. "Why, you filthy Nazi!" He dived for a scalpel, but Smith was too fast. The Webley's barrel thunked against Doc's temple, and the old man went down, cussing a blue streak till Smith hit him again.

"Gut!" one of the other thugs said. I hopped up from the operating table where I'd been squatting and lunged toward Smith, throwing a fast haymaker at his jaw. Unfortunately, my legs crumpled up, and I fell flat on my face, giving myself a nasty wallop on the nose.

"Who's that?" somebody said. I rolled over. The gunman with the squint was pointing—with his gun—toward my own body, curled up on the carpet and snoring.

Smith held up a warning hand. "Patient, I guess. Under ether, by the way he snores."

"He's got that helmet on."

"Ja, ja." Smith jerked it off. "The herrenvolken need this. And—" He removed my helmet. "—this, too. Number Three will be pleased. This way, we have to pay nothing for the device."

"Would we have paid anyway, Herr Schmidt?"

"Nein," said Herr Schmidt. "Do not be more stupid than you can help. By posing as a government official—ha! We waste time. Raus! I will meet you tonight—you know where."

"Ja, the circus," said the man with the squint.

"Sh-h!"

"Who is there to hear? The baby? Unsinn."

"No precaution is nonsense," Smith said. He was stuffing the two helmets in a small black satchel Doc had there on a glass case of instruments. "Hurry!"

They went out. I sat blankly on the operating table, sort of stunned. "Doc," I yelled.

No answer.

The floor looked a dickens of a ways down. But I knew I had to get off the table, some-

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how. I crawled around, cursing squeakily, till I discovered that I had a plenty strong grip for my size. My legs were pretty feeble, but my arms were okay.

I let myself down over the edge, hung on, dangling, and then dropped. It didn't hurt. I was so fat I bounced. When I picked myself up, the room seemed to have got bigger. Table, chairs—everything loomed way above me. Doc was lying motionless in a corner. I crawled over to him.

He was breathing. That was something, anyway. But I couldn't revive him. Concussion, I guessd. Hm-m.

My own body was still asleep. I shook its head till it woke up.

"Listen, kid," I said thickly. "Try to understand. We gotta get help. Can you hear me?"

I'd forgotten how young the baby was. He grabbed me by the seat of the diapers and started to drag me around like a puppy, going goo-goo in a sickening bass voice. I called him dirty names, and he finally let go and tried to eat his foot again. My foot!

I thought of the nurse, but when I crawled into the outer office, she was flattened over her desk, colder than a codfish. The sight of the phone gave me an idea. I couldn't reach it till I yanked on the cord. Then it thumped down, missing me by an inch.

I had trouble dialing; my fingers kept folding up. Finally I got a good grip on a pencil that had fallen off with the phone, and that helped. The operator asked me what I wanted.

"Goblobble—uh—police! Police headquarters." It was an awful strain to force the soft tissues of my throat and tongue into talking-position. I kept relapsing into mushy gargles.

"Desk sergeant. Yes?"

I TOLD him what I wanted—not much, just that there'd been a hi-jacking at the Doc's. He interrupted.

"Who is this talking?"

"Sergeant Cassidy, U. S. Marines."

"The devil you say!" He gave a offensive imitation of my voice, which was naturally squeaky. "Thargeant Catthidy, U. Eeth. Marinth. What is this, a gag?"

"No!" I squealed. "Blast it! Send up a squad."

"A thquad?"

I started to tell him about the Nazi lugs who'd stolen Doc's invention, but I had sense enough to shut up before I put my foot in it completely. I could feel the officer freezing. But he finally said he'd send a man around, and I had to be satisfied with that.

So I hung up and looked at my toes. I was thinking hard. I doubted if even Doc could convince anybody he'd invented a Transfer helmet. They'd classify him as a screwpot and toss him in the observation ward. And he was a scientist. I wasn't even a Marine, technically speaking. They don't have baby Marines.

Those helmets were valuable. I didn't know what Smith wanted with them, but I gathered that Germany might find 'em handy, somehow.

Then I had it. Spies! Holy jumping catfish!

A German mind inside the skull of an Allied brass hat—what a sweet method for espionage. Even fingerprinting wouldn't show the truth. The Nazis could filter in trained spies to key positions, and—and—win the war!

Whew!

But—hang it!—nobody would believe me. Doc might be able to convince 'em, with facts and figures, only I didn't know when he'd wake up. Meantime, Smith was going to turn the helmets over to Number Three, whoever that was. At the—yeah—at the circus.

I had my own troubles to worry about, too. Here I was, in Stinky's body. What would happen if I couldn't get the helmets back? I'd have to spend the rest of my life as a baby—until I grew up anyway. Somehow, I didn't like the idea of telling Captain Dawson what had happened.

Stinky, in my body, was gurgling and cooing in the other office, and I decided I'd better move, but fast. I tried my legs. They had a tendency to buckle, but I managed pretty well. I knew the trick of walking, I guess, and Stinky didn't. The muscles weren't too weak. They hadn't been trained, that was all.

But the outer door was shut, and I couldn't reach the knob.

It didn't take long to push a light chair where I needed it, and then I climbed up like a monkey till I could turn the knob. That was enough. Outside, the stairs gave me some trouble, though I got down by crawling backwards, feeling awfully unprotected from the rear. Finally I was in the vestibule, looking up at the big door there, and knowing I couldn't make it. There weren't any chairs down here.

I saw a shadow cross the pane, and the door swung open. It was a cop. He headed up the stairs without seeing me—he was looking up, not down—and I scrambled to get outside before the door shut. I was lucky. It was one of those pneumatic things. But I almost lost my diaper as I squeezed through.

So there I was on Park, not liking it at all. The people were too big. A few of them glanced at me as they passed, and I figured I'd better start moving. I fell down a couple of times, but that was nothing, except when a hatchet-faced dame with a voice like vinegar started to pick me up, saying something

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about a poor lost baby. What I told that lady made her drop me like a hot brick.

"Oh, my gracious!" she yelped. "Such language!"

She kept following me, though, and I knew I had to lose her somehow. It was the first time I'd ever been trailed by a cookie, even if she was overbaked. I saw a bar coming up, and realized I was thirsty. Anyway, I needed a drink. After what I'd been through, anybody would.

If I could sit down with a beer or something and think things over, it might help.

TURNING into the place, I managed the swinging door okay and went in, leaving beagle-puss outside, clucking like she'd gone crazy. It was a darkish, quiet sort of bar, with not many customers, and I climbed up a bar-stool without attracting attention. My eyes just came over the level of the mahogany.

"Rye," I said.

The bartender, a fat old guy in a white apron, looked around. He didn't see me.

"Rye!" I said again. "Beer chaser."

This time he saw me. His eyes bugged out. He came and leaned on the bar, staring at me. Finally he grinned.

"Well, look at the sprout," he chuckled. "Did I hear you ask for rye?"

"Listen, you big lug," I snarled. "You want me to pin yours ears back?"

"What with?" he asked. "Safety pins? Haw-haw!" He thought it was funny.

"Shut up and gimme a shot," I growled squeakily, and he found a bottle and a glass. I licked my lips. Then, just before he poured, he drew back and looked at me solemnly.

"I gotta see your draft card, old man," he said. "Haw-haw-haw!"

If I could have managed the words that came to my lips, he'd have known for certain I wasn't an innocent babe. But my palate, as usual, turned into mush.

"Glab-bab-da-da," I said, or words to the effect.

A dignified old buzzard with a gleaming watch-chain strung across his vest came over and picked me up.

"A fine thing," he boomed. "Mothers bringing their children into bars—and children this young!" He looked around searchingly, but nobody claimed me. A honey in a blue dress, sipping a cuba libre in a booth, said I wasn't hers, the darling, and could she hold me? All of a sudden an idea hit me. Billie! If I could get in touch with her.

Uh-uh. But I didn't like to have her see me like this?

I felt sick. Still it looked like the only way. The trouble was, I had no may of reaching her.

The old buzzard was getting ready to hand me over to the honey. It went against the grain, but I squalled and clung to the watch-chain, keeping it up till I put the idea across.

"I guess he likes you," the honey said. "Well, you keep him. His mother ought to show up pretty soon."

"Yes. Yes. Another scotch, Tony. There." He sat down in a booth, keeping me in his lap. I toyed thoughtfully with the watch-chain. He tickled me under the chin, and I managed to keep from calling him a dirty name.

"Poor baby, then. Is it a poor baby?"

Well, I was. Broke as the devil. Stoney. I needed dough!

After I'd finished with the watch-chain, I delved into the buzzard's vest pockets. As I'd hoped, there was a coin or two loose there. I dug out some change, but the lug tried to take it away from me. We had a sort of tussle, and the dough spilled out of my hand, tinkling over the floor.

"Ah, ah, naughty!" said Moneybags, and set me down carefully on the seat. He and the bartender started to pick up the coins.

I swung myself down, snaffled a nickel, and waddled unsteadily toward the back, where I'd seen a phone booth. Moneybags started after me, but I saw him coming. I headed for the honey in the blue dress, holding out my arms.

She picked me up. It wasn't hard to take. I kept pointing back toward the booth.

"What is it, baby? What a nice little fellow! Kiss, then?"

I complied, and she jumped and looked sort of startled. Oh, well. I kept pointing, and after a while she got the idea. Moneybags came along and stood grinning, obviously on the make, but she wasn't having any of the old goat.

"He seems to like you, Miss."

"Yes," she said vaguely. "He wants something."

"Phone," I said, not daring to make it clearer.

"Oh, he can talk! He knows a few words, doesn't he?" she smiled at me. "You darling! But you can't use the phone. You're not old enough."

"Mm-m," I said. "Kiss."

AT THIS the honey blinked. She got up rather fast and took me to the phone booth, holding me up to the mouthpiece. I tried to wriggle free, and managed to get my feet on the seat. Then I waved my arms at her and yelled, "Go 'way."

She stepped back, startled, letting me go, and I tried to close the folding door. Moneybags was hovering in the background, only too anxious to help, and he shut it for me.

"Oh, but—he'll hurt himself, in there."

She was too late. I'd got the receiver

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down, slipped a nickel in the slot, and was frantically dialing, having a dickens of a time with my folding fingers. I could see Moneybags and the honey staring at me, so I kept my voice as low as possible when I finally got through to Billie.

"Look, Billie, this is Jerry—"

"Jerry who?"

"Cassidy!" I said. "You know me—we got a date tonight."

"I have with Jerry Cassidy. But I know Jerry's voice. Sorry, but I'm busy right now."

"Wait! I—uh—got some throat trouble. This is me, honest. I'm in a jam."

"As usual. I—you're not hurt, are you?"

"Not exactly, but I need help, plenty bad. It's life and death, hon!"

"Oh, Jerry! Of course I'll help. Where are you?"

I gave her the address of the bar. "Get down here as fast as you can. You'll find me—I mean you'll find a baby here. Pick him up and call a taxi. And don't be surprised by anything you hear."

"But where are you? What's this about a baby?"

"Tell you later. Rush right down."

Moneybags opened the door. I hung up and slammed a right hook on his jaw. The lug thought I was playing or something.

"Isn't he clever? Pretending to use the phone like that. I think this calls for a drink, Miss."

"Well, all right." She picked me up, and I let her, not knowing what else to do. So I sat in her lap while Moneybags fed her drinks, and every time the old boy tried to make a date, I yelled. After a while he took a dislike to me. Do you wonder?

CHAPTER III

Infant Sleight-of-Hand

YES, I think Moneybags was getting ready to strangle me when Billie arrived, at last. She's a trim, pert little trick with long, glossy dark curls and an oval face and everything that goes with it. The minute I saw her come in, I bounced like mad, waved my arms, and yelled.

Billie looked surprised, but she didn't ask any questions. Moneybags watched her come toward us.

"Is this your child, Madame?" he asked.

"Maa-maa!" I bawled, when Billie hesitated. I could see she was wondering what this was all about. My throat got dry. I couldn't swallow till Billie finally nodded and grabbed me. She stared around, searching, I knew, for me, but Sergeant Cassidy was wearing mufti just then—if you can call knitted wraps and stuff mufti.

I didn't dare say anything, but I hoped Billie would remember what I'd told her on the phone. She did. She took me out and called a taxi.

"Where to, Miss?"

"The Garden!" I piped.

He didn't notice who was talking. Billie did, though, and she stared at me with her eyes getting bigger and bigger.

"Relax, hon," I said. "Keep a grip on yourself. Something awful's happened."

"Uh-huh," she said, whispering. "It sure has. I'm crazy. Oo-oh!"

She got white and shut her eyes. I had a nasty moment when I thought she was fainting. How the devil could a baby administer first aid in a taxi?

"Billie!" I squeaked. "Blog-wob-blob. . . . Wake up! It's me! Jerry! Don't pass out on me."

"B-but—" She started to giggle hysterically, and I knew she was okay. "Oh, my goodness! You're a midget, of course, pretending to be Jerry."

I tilted back my head and stared up at her face, way up there. My eyes kept slipping out of focus, as usual. I felt mad, sick, hopeless. Shucks, you've been a baby yourself. You know how it feels. With me it was worse.

"Billie, I want you to listen and try to understand," I said. "I'll lay it flat on the line. It's daffy, but you gotta believe me."

Billie sighed. She was pale around the ears.

"Shoot," she said, "I'll try, anyhow."

So I told her what had happened. All the while I kept wondering how to get out of this mess. If Billie couldn't help—well, I didn't know anybody else who could, except the Doc, and he was a non-combatant just at present. I'd already tried the cops. I knew how the desk sergeant must have felt. If a stupid-looking baby had slung such a spiel at me a few days ago, I'd have laughed it off—if that. But in my spot, what else was there to do?

It was awful. Jerry Cassidy had always been able to take care of himself. A man who weighs two hundred stripped, and no fat, is apt to get pretty cocky. Besides, I knew a few little tricks—some Jap wrestling angles, and some Apache footwork. A lot of good that did me now. I couldn't even pull the trigger on a light automatic, probably.

What good is a baby, anyway?

That got me started thinking of Mrs. Dawson and the Captain. Stinky was a lot of good to them, anyhow. By this time Mrs. Dawson must have come back from her shopping and found me gone. Oh-oh!

Also I was dead tired, for some reason.

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My muscles felt like watery egg-yolk. I never felt so sleepy, that I could remember.

I managed to finish telling Billie what had happened, but then I must have fallen asleep in her lap. When I woke up, we were in a drug-store booth, and she was shaking me.

"Wake up, Jerry! Wake up!"

"Da da da," I mumbled. "Waaa . . . oh. Wh-wha—"

"You dozed off," Billie told me. "Babies need a lot of sleep."

"Lay off that baby stuff! I—say, you called me Jerry! So you do believe me, huh?"

Billie frowned. "Yes. How do you feel now?"

"Okay. Well, thirsty. I want a drink."

"What?"

"Beer," I said.

"What you'll get is milk."

I MADE strangling noises. "Milk! Billie, for Pete's sake! I may look like a sprat, but I'm still Jerry Cassidy."

"Milk," she said firmly. "I'll get you a nursing bottle."

But I drew the line at that. Billie compromised by getting me a glass of milk, and I had some trouble managing it, slurping the blasted stuff all over my front. Finally we figured out the best way for me to drink—I used straws.

It wasn't beer, but it helped. I was plenty thirsty. I sucked away, and Billie told me what had happened.

"I phoned headquarters, Jerry. I told 'em I was looking for you."

"Uh? Oh. Bwob—I mean, what happened?"

"Doctor McKenney's still unconscious. So's his nurse. They're in emergency. It's nothing serious, though. And—" She hesitated.

"Go on."

Billie gulped. "They said they had a Sergeant Cassidy there, all right, but he was either drunk or nuts. All he would do was crawl around on the floor, play with his toes, and cry. They—they said it was an open and shut case. He—you—Jerry, must have gone out of his head and slugged the doctor and his nurse."

"Out of his head is right," I said weakly. "Right into this dopey little noggin." I slammed a fat fist against my skull.

"Gee," Billie said. "I wonder if you looked like this when you were a baby. You must have been awfully cute."

"Lay off that," I howled. "We got work to do."

"I don't know what we can do, Jerry. When the doctor wakes up, maybe he'll think of something."

"What about those Nazis?" I asked. "Smith and Number Three and the others?"

"I don't see what we can do."

"Look," I said. "They're going to the circus, at the Garden. It's a swell place to meet, in a crowd. Smith's got the Transfer helmets in that satchel, and I bet he'll try to slip it to Number Three."

Billie nodded. I went on.

"You take me to the circus, see? We'll wander around. I can spot Smith and the two lugs he had with him. When I do that, you call a cop. Make up some yarn—anything. Get the cop to arrest Smith, or—well, the trick is to get that satchel. After that, it's in the bag."

"Maybe I could grab it."

"Uh-uh. Those Nazis have guns. I don't want you to take chances. You do what I tell you, and play safe. Blast it!" I said. "I wish I could get my hands on an automatic, or a Mills." I thought that over and chuckled. "They don't hang babies in this state, do they?"

"Don't talk like that, Jerry!"

"Well, where are we?"

"On Eighth."

"Avenue? Near the Garden? Swell! Let's go."

"Without tickets?"

"Oh-oh. Got any dough?"

Billie nodded. "Yesterday was pay-day. Anyway, I won't have to pay for you."

"It's a loan," I said firmly. "I'm no gigolo."

"Not at your age," she agreed. "You'd look funny doing the samba with those muffin-like feet of yours."

I swallowed that, though I didn't like it. "Let's go," I said with dignity, and Billie picked me up, paid the check and carried me out. She didn't know much about holding babies, I could tell. I sort of dangled. The sidewalk looked to be a mile down.

Billie had to get a ticket from a scalper, but, anyway, we got in. After that, it wasn't easy to know what to do. The Garden's a big place.

"Any idea where Smith was to meet Number Three?"

"Nope," I said helplessly. "We better just wander around. I'm bound to spot the lug sometime—I hope."

We wandered. Anywhere there were crowds. But I didn't catch a glimpse of the Nazi with the mustache and the sleepy eyes, or his two sidekicks either. Naturally I didn't even know what Number Three looked like.

WE WENT in the freak show and looked at fire-eaters and sword-swallowers, midgets, skeletons, and fat ladies. We watched lions, elephants, a couple of hippos, and a giraffe or two. We saw a big crowd at one cage and we went over there. It was a gorilla, almost as big as Gargantua or Tony Galento, squatting behind bars and glass and jamming a food-basin on his head and yanking it off

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again. The keeper, standing by the door, kept up a long spiel that drew the crowd like flies, but I still couldn't find Smith. Or the Doc's satchel, with the Transfer helmets in it.

I was beginning to feel sleepy again. I also felt awful. If Smith got away with this gag, it would mean—whew! Spies scattered all through our lines—up at the top, too! They'd be completely undetectable spies!

I had my own troubles, also. Suppose Doc died? Suppose he got amnesia? Suppose he couldn't make more of the helmets? I'd have to spend the rest of my life with Captain Dawson as my old man! Unless he murdered me, for—for—what was it? Kidnaping? What if he broke me and put me on permanent K.P.? I could see myself, a fat, blobby-looking squirt in diapers, peeling spuds day and night—or maybe in the guardhouse, loaded down with chains—uh!

One thing I knew—I couldn't be Sergeant Jerry Cassidy like this. How could I handle a machine gun? As for a rifle, I wouldn't even be able to lift it.

Maybe they'd send Stinky, in my body, back on active service. Yeah! With a Jap coming at him, bayonet ready, he'd fall over on his back and start playing with his toes. Oh-oh!

Billie shook me. I was getting sleepy again, and showed it. I managed to prop my eyes open, though it was still hard to focus them.

"It's okay," I whispered. And yawned.

"Jerry, you can't take a nap now."

"I—uh—won't." But I did. I couldn't help it. Babies need lots of sleep, and I felt dead beat.

However, Billie pinched me. I woke up with a squeal, and noticed a battleship of a dame bearing down on us, a steely glint in her eye. Billie didn't see her coming till it was too late.

"What are you doing with that child?" the battleship demanded.

"Nothing," Billie said, looking confused. "I just pinched him. He keeps wanting to go to sleep."

"Pinched him! Good heavens! What sort of mother are you?"

"I'm not," Billie snapped, trying to keep me from falling out of her arms. She had me by one foot and one hand and was sort of wrapping me up in myself, like I was an octopus. "I'm not even married."

The old girl froze. "What are you doing with that baby, then?" she asked, as if it was any of her business.

Billie was getting confused. "I'm going to marry him," she said wildly. "I'm just waiting for him to grow up. Oh, go away. We're busy."

"Hmph! This seems very suspicious to me. Have you been drinking, young lady?"

"No.. I've been trying to keep this—this—" She waved me in the battleship's face "—trying to keep it from drinking, if you must know. It—he—keeps yelling for beer."

"What? You mean you give that infant beer?"

"I don't have to, usually," Billie gasped, as I nearly flipped out of her grip. "He orders it himself, when he isn't gargling rye. This lug has drunk his way around the world."

"My gracious! That poor little innocent child! I'm going to take steps to have you punished."

Just then the poor little innocent child made a few well-chosen remarks.

"You blathering old buzzard," I howled. "Beat it and stop upsetting Billie. You'll have her dropping me in a minute. If you want to help, drag yourself off and come back with a bottle of beer. I'm thirsty, drat it!"

"Gok!" said the battleship, turning green under her camouflage paint. She made a few vague gestures, clawed at the air, turned, and toddled off as fast as she could.

"See what you've done?" Billie said. "The poor woman thinks she 's crazy."

"Serve her right," I growled squeakily. "Hurry up and let's find Smith before I go to sleep again. Try that show over there, where the acrobats are."

THERE were seats here, and Billie stood at the entrance, while I looked around. Suddenly I let out a muffled yipe.

"There he is! See, up by that column? The guy with the mustache?"

"Where? Oh—I see him. What—what'll I do now?"

Smith wasn't sitting with anybody. He was humped up on his seat, intently watching some gymnasts on a trapeze, and I noticed the black satchel was between his feet.

"Maybe we'd better hunt up a cop," I whispered. "Don't take any chances, Billie."

But she didn't seem to hear. Still toting me, she went up the aisle, edged across, and sat down right next to Smith. I felt my stomach go cold. The sleepy-eyed Nazi gave us a quick, sidewise look, and then turned back to staring at the show. He didn't recognize me, I figured. All babies look pretty much alike, fat and droopy.

There, not three feet away from me, was the satchel, with the Transfer helmets in it—I hoped. They were there unless Smith had already turned them over to Number Three. I guessed he hadn't done so. He'd have given Number Three the satchel, without risking attracting attention by digging out the helmets.

I looked around for Smith's two pet thugs, but I couldn't find them in the crowd. Billie didn't dare say anything to me, nor would I

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have dared answer her, with our enemy right beside us. I sat in Billie's lap and wondered what she was planning, and tried to make a plan or two myself. If I could sneak off with the bag.

It was an idea. I caught Billie's eye and winked, pointing down. After a minute she put me beside her, on the seat, and when Smith wasn't looking, lowered me to the floor. I ducked in under the seats, where I couldn't be seen, and felt dust choking me. I was thirsty again.

There wasn't any beer on draught where I was, so I crawled behind Billie's legs and kept going till I was behind a pair of blue serge pants. Between Smith's feet was the black bag, partly under the seat, where he'd pushed it to keep it hidden, I guess. I didn't dare touch the satchel. He'd have felt me trying to slide it away.

If I could open it, I could sneak out the helmets.

I tried that. I had an idea that Smith would look down any minute and then step on me. But I had to get those helmets. That was the first and most important angle. After that, even if Smith managed to escape, he'd have to do it without the helmets.

The snap lock on the bag gave me a lot of trouble. My fingers were filled with mush. They kept bending back. When finally I did click the lock open, it snapped like a pistol shot. I froze, knowing that I'd be stepped on in another second or two.

But the band had been playing plenty loud, and the sound hadn't been as explosive as I'd thought. Anyway, Smith didn't glance down. After my heart came back where it belonged, I started to open the satchel, inch by inch. Not far, just enough so I could slip my arm in and feel around. When I did that, I touched the smooth fabric of one of the helmets right away.

I sneaked it out and went after the other one. As I got it, there was a thump, and another pair of pants-legs appeared. Somebody had sat down beside Smith. I saw the new guy's foot reach over and press Smith's shoe, tapping out what looked like a code.

Number Three!

CHAPTER IV

Heavy on the Muscles

WHEW! I looked at those brown-tweed legs and those brown oxfords, with a long scratch across one toe, and started sweating. If Smith discovered what had happened now, it'd be curtains for Cassidy, or Stinky, or whoever I was!

But nobody made a move. Apparently neither Nazi wanted to take chances, with Billie sitting right beside them. That gave me a breather, anyhow. What next?

The problem was settled right away. I heard a squalling, familiar voice squawking. "That's the girl!" the voice said. "That's her! I'm sure she's kidnaped the baby." It was the hatchet-faced battlewagon!

She'd come back with cops. The minute I heard a deep brogue telling Billie to come along quietly, I knew the lid was off. Wow! If Billie went off, leaving me here with those two lugs, it'd be all up with Jerry Cassidy!

Billie knew it too. I couldn't see much, but I heard a scuffling, heard the battlewagon cry out in pain, and heard Billie's voice raised in argument. She was talking about Nazi spies.

"Those men, officer," she insisted. "Right beside me, here. They're enemy agents. They're stealing an important invention."

"Now, now," said the cop. "Take it easy, lady."

But Smith made a mistake. He reached down for the bag, and his fumbling fingers discovered that it was open.

"*Donner und*—officer! This girl is a thief. She has my helmets stolen."

Number Three's foot kicked Smith's leg, and the dope shut up, but it was too late. He'd made a fatal break. New York cops are quick on the uptake.

I heard a shout, a banging noise, and the blue serge pants flipped apart. I looked right into Smith's face as he bent down and peered under the seat. He saw me, crouching there gripping the Transfer helmets. His hand shot out to grab me. I scrambled back just in time.

"Hold it, mister," the cop said. "Hey! Drop that gun, you!" I guessed he meant Number Three, for Smith was busy trying to crawl over the back of his seat and get at me. This time the banging noise wasn't feet clumping. A gun had gone off.

The cop didn't fire in that crowd. He just went for Number Three. The two of them got tangled up with Smith, and that gave me a chance to duck out into the aisle. People were getting up, startled, a whistle was shrilling, and Billie and the battlewagon were rolling down the incline, fighting like wildcats. Somebody who looked familiar was ducking out into the animal show next door. It was the thug with the squint, Smith's sidekick.

I only got a glimpse. Smith had freed himself from the tangle and was coming at me again. I dived under the seats again. I had a slight advantage in being so small, but I was weak, too, and I had to keep hold of the helmets. Smith had his Webley out.

I dodged toward the other aisle. Just in time I looked up and saw Smith's other pal

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coming to meet me, with a nasty grin on his pan. I scooted away like a tadpole. A baby can crawl pretty fast, especially when he doesn't have to bother about broken-field running. Those rows of seats were slowing down my pursuers a little, and that helped.

Then the lid blew off completely. There'd been quite a rumpus anyhow, but I heard a tumult of sound that nearly deafened me. People were shouting and screaming and stamping all around.

"Gott!" the Nazi on my left yelped. "Erik has let the gorilla loose. Shoot the brat."

"Nein," Smith snapped. "This will give us a chance to get away in the excitement. But first the helmets, quick."

They came after me again. This time I reversed my route—I'd been scuttling up the ramp—and went down. It was faster. I wasn't being shot at, luckily. The Germans were afraid of putting a bullet through the helmets, I guess.

I ducked a hand that swooped down at me, slipped, and went rolling down like a ball. I couldn't stop myself. But I still kept a tight grip on the Transfer helmets. When I stopped, I was a little ways out in the arena, and it was empty. The exits were jammed with people fighting their way out.

Twenty feet away, coming toward me with his mouth wide open, was the gorilla!

I BEAT a retreat faster than Rommel ever did. Of course the seat under which I crouched wouldn't protect me at all if that big monkey took a notion to grab me, but there weren't any bomb shelters handy. I didn't know what had happened to Smith and his pal, though I could hear the cop and Number Three still fighting above me somewhere. Billie had vanished, too.

The gorilla was hesitating, getting ready to wander off somewhere. When he did that, I knew, Smith would close in, and I'd be trapped.

Then I remembered something— seeing the gorilla, in his cage, fitting his food-basin on his bullet head. Maybe—maybe there was an out.

I clicked the switches on both the helmets, leaving them turned that way, and threw one of the gadgets at the monkey. My pitching arm wasn't so hot just then. But the gorilla saw the helmet, and it aroused his curiosity. He picked it up, blinked, and wandered away. I yelled at him. Smith was beginning to pluck up courage. I couldn't see him, but I could hear him starting to move nearer.

The gorilla turned and looked at me. I scuttled out into the arena. A glance behind me showed that Smith's pet thug had ganged up with Number Three on the cop. The officer was still fighting, but he was being pistol-whipped.

Also, circling around toward me, through the seats, was not only Smith, but the squint-eyed lug who'd let the gorilla out.

My legs were too wobbly to be useful. I was pooped out. For a baby, I'd been having a devil of a lot of exercise. If Smith rushed me now, I knew I wouldn't be able to crawl away fast enough to elude him. So I sat there, with the gorilla staring at me, and put the helmet on my head.

Then I took it off. Monkey-face opened his mouth stupidly. He'd forgotten about the helmet he was holding. Lame-brain!

I kept jamming the helmet over my head and yanking it off again, and finally the gorilla got so interested he took a step toward me, dropping his own helmet as he did so. I saw him look down, pick up the thing, and finger it inquisitively.

"Hey!" I squealed. "Over here! Like this!"

He stared at me. I put the helmet on and, just then, a big hand clamped down on my arm. I tried to jerk free, but I just wasn't strong enough. I had a brief glimpse of Smith's sleepy-eyed face, with its hard, rat-trap mouth, and then—

Then I wasn't there any more. I was standing in the arena looking across to where Smith was picking up a baby. My arms were lifted, fitting something on to my head.

The helmet! It wasn't my head, either. The helmet hardly came over the top of the furry crown. I took one look down, and that was enough.

I wasn't a baby any more. I was a gorilla. Wow!

The helmet almost fell off my head, and I caught it awkwardly, not yet used to my new body. As I wondered what to do with the thing, I saw Billie across the arena, rising from the prostrate body of the battlewagon. I yelled at her, and it came out a deep, booming roar. But she looked at me.

I tossed her the helmet. Then I went for Smith!

Guns were popping off somewhere, which didn't mean anything. The bullets went wild. Did you ever try to fire a snap shot at a bellowing gorilla charging straight at you? Okay, then.

Smith dropped the baby as I got there, and hurdled a row of seats. I caught the kid, set him down gently, and kept going. I didn't bother to jump over the seats. I just tore 'em up. I ploughed ahead toward Smith, stopping only to gather in the squint-eyed thug and pick him up in one mighty hand. He wasn't so heavy. I threw him at Smith.

They went down, hard. I landed on top of them, with a crash of splintered wood. They didn't bother to get up.

Somebody fired a shot at me. It was the squint-eyed Nazi. He and Number Three had finally managed to knock out the cop,

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though it took two of them, clubbing their guns. I couldn't see Number Three.

THE gunman thought he was out of my reach, but he'd forgotten how long a gorilla's arms are. I didn't realize that myself till I swung hard, heard a klunk, and saw the guy go spinning off like a pinwheel. He didn't get up, either.

Billie screamed. That whirled me around in a hurry. She was halfway across the arena, running to pick up Stinky and the other helmet, running as fast as she could, and Number Three was racing after her, his gun ready. The crowds around the exits were making so much rumpus that hardly anybody noticed what was happening. But I did.

Gorillas can't go fast, except for short distances. Number Three had too good a lead. He'd catch Billie before I could catch him—unless I did something quick.

I charged down the swathe of destruction I'd made, and leaped up with all my strength. The gymnasts had fled, but their equipment was still here. One trapeze was hooked back right where I wanted it. I caught the bar, and my weight ripped it free from its hook. It carried me sailing across the arena, straight for Number Three.

He'd stopped. He was standing motionless, taking steady aim at Billie's back as she stooped to scoop up Stinky.

Then I saw I was going to miss him. The trapeze was arcking me off to the left. I let go, twisting frantically in midair, and went swooshing down. If I missed—Number Three wouldn't!

I gave a last desperate writhe. A gun went off, but a fraction before that, I hit. I hit with all the impact of a gorilla's tremendous bulk. Luckily, my fall was cushioned.

It was tough on Number Three, though. They couldn't even scrape him up afterward. They had to use blotting paper.

I got up and brushed myself off. Billie wasn't hurt, I saw. Anyhow, she was running again. I yelled her name. It came out in an unintelligible roar.

But she must have heard something familiar in it, for she stopped and looked over her shoulder. I couldn't talk, of course, but I made gestures. But Billie got the idea.

She knew what I wanted—one of the helmets. So she tossed it to me, though she didn't get too close. After making sure the switch was on, I fitted it on my head as well as I could. People were closing in now, keepers and so forth. There wasn't much time. I pointed insistently.

Billie put the other helmet over Stinky's head. The switch had been flipped off, but she moved it when I made pointing motions. That did it.

I wasn't a gorilla any more. I was in Billie's arms, panting with exhaustion, and feeling thirsty and sleepy as the dickens.

"Jerry!" she gasped. "Are you all right? Is this you now?"

"Yeah," I said. "Get the other helmet back after they catch the gorilla. We'll need it to—to—bwob-wob—uh—"

It was no use. I'd turned into mush. I went to sleep, right then and there. . . .

When I woke up, I started to crawl automatically, but it didn't feel right, somehow. Then I knew why. I was me again.

I was lying on a couch, and Billie was sitting beside me, watching. She looked tired.

"Oh, gosh," I said. "What happened, hon?"

"Jerry!"

"Uh-huh. All of me, for a change. How come?"

"Doctor McKenney recovered—he didn't have a concussion, after all. He verified the whole business, and used the helmets while you were asleep. Stinky's a baby all through now, and you're—you're a hero. It'll be in all the papers. And the government sent somebody to arrange about the helmets with the doctor."

She had it all mixed up, but I got the idea.

"Stinky's okay?"

"He's fine. He wasn't hurt a bit. And it wasn't your fault, Jerry, after all. You couldn't help what happened. So don't feel badly."

I looked at her. "About what?"

"Well, you did capture those enemy agents, and everything. He can't be too hard on you!"

"Who?"

"Captain Dawson," Billie said. "He's waiting outside to see you. Mrs. Dawson went home with Stinky."

I gulped. "Oh. How does he look?"

"Kind of mad," Billie admitted. "Where are you going?"

"Look, there's another door, see?" I said. "And there's a fire escape outside that window. My pass is good for another two days, and by that time Captain Dawson may decide not to court martial me. Somehow I don't think I better see him now."

"Maybe you're right. But I'm coming with you."

"Swell," I said. "What I need is a beer. Let's go!"

We went.

I didn't see the Captain till my pass was up. I guess he'd cooled off a little. But—uh—not much. Besides, he couldn't have meant all the things he said. I don't know where he ever picked up such language. Oh, well. I got one consolation. I'm a hero, even if I am on extra duty, bossing a fatigue detail.

I'm warning you lugs—if anybody calls me Baby Face again—well, I'm warning you, that's all!

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THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

STORY. And following this tale in turn will come a brilliant assortment of short stories, articles and features, with old man Saturn bringing up the rear, dodging the ray guns of Lovecraft fans.

Yes, the summer issues of THRILLING WONDER STORIES is going to be important. What's that, Wart-ears? Snaggle-tooth is stuck in the coils? Distill him, anything, but get that Xeno ready while the Sarge still has a friend left, I hope, I hope. . . .

LETTERS FROM READERS

JUST how this arid astrogator is going to react to his letters without the mellowing solace of Xeno is something all writer-inners should shudder at. So, pee-lots and kiwis, prepare for the lacing of your lives. To take the initial impact, we have selected a veteran of the spaceways, and hereby give him first place in the column with malice afore-and-ahind-thought.

YOUNG MAN'S FANCY—ROCKS!

By Joe Kennedy

Sarge, Oldde Top: In the spring, a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of—TWS. So saying, let us focus our attention on the current issue of that noble publication. We find, after plunking down the necessary 15c, an excellent novelet by Fredric Brown and a hideous cover by paint-slinger Bergey. Aaaaghhh! That cover. Let's say no more on the subject. Maybe, in time, even *that* can be forgotten. We fervently hope so. . . .

You will, doubtless, be interested to learn that I, Josephus Q. Kennedy IV, have *solved the paper shortage*. Forsooth, I shall elucidate. Instead of printing TWS on so crude an item as paper, think—just think! —how much better it would be to publish the mag on slabs of rock!

I can see it now. One hundred and sixteen slabs of granite, hinged together for convenient reading. The stories would be carved into the stone. Imagine it! The immortal words of the TWS authors would last for ages. You can take that for granite.

If, while reading a story, one happened to spill some drool upon it, the mag could easily be cleaned with the aid of the garden hose. The new TWS would be at least ten feet thick.

All those wishing to enroll in the Universal Order for the Publishing of Science-Fiction Magazines on Slabs of Rock (UOPSFMSR) may do so by tearing off the top of a BEM, so that the tendrils and bug-eyes may be seen, and mailing it together with a stamped, self-addressed newsdealer to me, Josephus Q. Kennedy IV, in care of the Ipsy-Pipsy Rest Home, Sayved-by-the-Bell, Scotland. Your membership card, handsomely printed in sixty-five different colors on a slab of concrete, will be sent to you immediately. If you would like a button, enclose 17¾c in stamps, and I'll be glad to cut one off my shirt for you.

Now to lighter things.

In my letter, I made the error of crediting Richard Tooker with G. K. Chesterton's THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY. I *meant* to say that he wrote the very fine novel, THE DAY OF THE BROWN HORDE. My mistake. Too much Jovian joy-juice mebbe. . . .

Whattaya know. The Dovercon got a plug. Sorry you weren't invited to that affair, Saturn, ole buoy, but it must've been an oversight. The gathering will be held again in '45, and I'll issue you an invitation then. Okay?

Good letters in READER SPEAKS this time. Jack Hoffman, Oliver, Fred Warth, Greenleaf, Dick Rosen, Lusk, Austin (ahem) Hamel, Frank, Trucano—ahh they're all good. For the benefit of Ken Krueger (who had the best letter of the issue this trip, flappily enuf) I list my own favorite ten scientifantasy tales.

1. THE SHIP FROM NOWHERE, by Patzer. A masterpiece.
2. THE OUTSIDER, by Lovecraft. The best I've read by the best exponent of supernatural horror who ever contributed to the science fiction magazines.
3. THE DERELICT, by Hodgson. This would scare a vampire.
4. TWILIGHT, by Campbell
5. THE IDEAL, by Weinbaum. About the finest of the van Manderpootz tales. THE NEW ADAM was good, but—
6. MOON POOL, by Merritt
7. YELLOW SIGN, by Chambers
8. DOORWAY INTO TIME, by Moore
9. THE TIME MACHINE, by Wells. The time travel tale to end all ttt's.
10. ALAS, ALL THINKING? by Bates.

These are merely muh own favorites, o' course, but they're all darn good tales, stories, yarns or what-have-you.

So, rash Sergeant, you doubt my vast artistic abilities? Well, I'll be forgiving. I might even be persuaded to tackle a few covers for TWS, but of course some slight financial reimbursement might be welcomed. Five thousand per week will do for a start.—*84 Baker Avenue, Dover, New Jersey.*

So you really want to put the Sarge on the rocks, do you, epicene offspring of a Martian Leprechaun? Is that nice? And how do you propose to remove lipstick stains or mark your place by turning down the corner of a page?

As for your belated invitation, ye Sarge is still sulking. In view of the second choice on your all time list and its authorship, even your plug for this old space-travelling letterbox hasn't lifted the gloom—and won't until the Xeno is brewed anyway. Not to discourage your artistic ambitions, Kiwi Josephus IV, there could easily be an opening *if* we adopt your rock policy. You should be able to chisel yourself onto the staff about then.

No, not you, Frog-eyes, but what's that you're holding—Xeno? Oh, frabjious day, calloo cal—gulp, gulp. Green, but still heaven. Aaaaaahhh, tell old Snaggy to poke his ugly snoot in here. He's forgiven. And as for the time-warped letters, we'll use them anyhow—but not again. Catch up, Pee-lots!

GRUMBLE FROM GREENCASTLE

By Frances L. Schaff

Hullo Sarge: Mumble . . . mumble . . . mumble! Years ago I swore that I would never write a letter like this to you, or any other sort of letter for that matter. But I have been driven to desperation.

Up till now I have always enjoyed TWS immensely. The art work, the literature and the special features were always tops. But now—howling Hannah! That cover! Can't your artists even read? Jeepers, but I miss Finlay and his super-duper stuff. That fellow was really in the groove.

I know you can blame the war for taking your pet artists, etc. But us gals beef about the war too (and the resulting lack of men) only we don't sit back and turn in sloppy work and blame it on the war. What some people need are some extra special vitamin pills and not so much of your Xeno juice.

I have missed out on the last three issues of TWS (more war stuff) so I am slightly behind on some of the knottier problems that are being discussed in THE READER SPEAKS. But I hope to catch up soon. Wish me luck.

This Krueger guy—he puzzles me, Sarge. A fellow who doesn't appreciate a curvacious cutie? Ummmmmm, I wonder, is he man or is he mouse? The idea of a male who prefers an octopus to a pretty gal, that just kinda throws me.

Well 'nough said. Maybe too much. But I just had to get all this off my chest. And if you've got nerve enough to print this, I'll be surprised. Yes indeed!—*South Carlisle Street, Greencastle, Pennsylvania.*

Po, po Bergey! What is it about ye Sarge's

[*Turn page*]

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favorite cover artist that drives all you pee-lots to base imitations of Xeno? Even his preoccupation with brass bras seems more amusing than infuriating to this old spacester. As for Finlay, we miss him too—but when Uncle Sambo calls you, he calls you. . . . .

As for you, Shiwi Schaff, why pick on Krueger? Compared to your average pretty gal, an octopus is virtually without tentacles. At least you can see the tentacles on a cuttlefish when it embraces you, whereas, when a good looking shee-lot does her stuff. . . . .

What's that about five-o'clock shadow, Frog-eyes? Bring on the hand mirror, the eyebrow tweezers and another jug of Xeno. I'll need a bracer before this ordeal.

BEMBI

By G. Dallas

Dear Old Space Pooch: This letter, like me, is peculiar. It concerns back issues of TWS. This should be easy for you, seeing as how you are a little backward yourself. The issues in mind are—January, 1941, February, 1942, August, 1942, April, 1943, and June, 1943. I know you are eagerly awaiting my comments, so I'll merely rate them in order.

January, 1941
1. CRYSTAL INVADERS. Was it supposed to be a series?
2. THE GREEKS HAD A WAR FOR IT
3. CITADEL OF SCIENCE
4. REMEMBER TOMORROW
5. SECRET OF THE COMET
6. HISTORY CLASS 2133 A. D.
7. COVER
8. ROBOT BEASTS
9. MAD MOLECULE

February, 1942
1. RENDEZVOUS IN THE VOID. Make the author a staff member.
2. LUXURY LINER
3. THIS IS HELL
4. MEDICAL NOTE
5. DEATH ON THE SIDERITE
6. VIA JUPITER. Everyone will jump on me for this one.
7. COVER

August, 1942
1. PRIVATE BROWN'S BLITZKRIEG
2. LAND OF THE BURNING SEA
3. METEORIC MR. MYRTLE. The story said he had to see the place he wanted to be transported to. Wouldn't that leave him hanging on the wing of the plane?
4. SATELLITE OF PERIL
5. COVER
6. MINNIE OF MARS
7. HUNTER OF THE KING PLANET

April, 1943
1. CONQUEST OF VENUS
2. COVER
3. HEAVY MAN
4. INVINCIBLE WRESTLER
5. PAWNS OF CHAOS. Where did you get that title?
6. LOTOS JUICE

June, 1943
1. COVER. Best BEM I've ever seen.
2. WOBBLIES ON THE MOON
3. GRIEF OF BAGDAD
4. GOLDEN TEMPLE
5. TWO-TIMING MAN
6. THRU THE BLACKBOARD
7. CHILDREN OF THE GODS
8. LAND OF THE LIVING DEAD
9. DEVIL'S FIDDLE

Answer me a question—is CAPTAIN FUTURE an annual, or has it been discontinued? How can Futuremen members write letters in? We'll be disqualified.

Sarge, not that I'm so ignorant, but lately I've been seeing the phrases BEMs and BMMS. Now what on earth is a BMM? A figment of a Xenoan imagination?

Since everybody is contributing plots, I feel it my duty to add my simple sample. BEMS rule supreme in Bemlandia, having a swell time. But suddenly all the BEMettes become revolting (in more ways than one). BEMs then evacuate to safety and captured ones are thrown into a pit full of pain eradicator.

[*Turn to page 104*]

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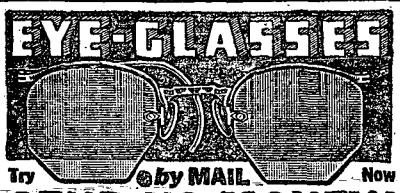

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The BEMettes have found a way of producing BEMettes with watercolors. Finally few BEMS are left, and they all bunch together to make a super-acid bomb. They plant this in the paint factory and commit suicide by hitting the bomb, also destroying the colors.

The BEMettes grow old without BEMs, and finally the whole race dies away. TWS cover artists are fired for this, and commit suicide. Their wives and kiddies go crazy and destroy all STF offices. STF readers think it is rival detective stories.

Soon World War III starts and the whole world is destroyed. For a finale, an aged BEMette looks over smouldering wreckage, crying. Good for a cover.

Which reminds me, I must go to the rescue of a dazzling beauty in the clutches of a loathsome BEM. Toodle-ooooooo! And fellows, don't kid the Sarge about Xeno. He hates the sight of the stuff and drinks it only to get it out of his sight (ouch!)—*6615 Lawnview, Cleveland, Ohio.*

P. S. Why not an amateur artist contest too? If you can spare it, give this a little thought, Sarge.

Well, Kiwi Dallas, if you don't know about CAPTAIN FUTURE yet, you must have been spending a little too much time having BEM-dreams. What a synopsis! Synapses is more like it. For your ear alone, and long may it flap, pee-lot, CAPTAIN FUTURE'S latest adventure, RED SUN OF DANGER, by Brett Sterling, is at present appearing in our current companion magazine, STARTLING STORIES. Other CF's will appear there occasionally until an easing of wartime paper restrictions permits the magazine to resume full-time publication.

NO SHORTS (TSK, TSK)!

By Benson Perry

Dear Sarge: This may sound queer, but when I saw TWS on the newsstand, I did not scream in anguish or wear an eyeshade. Nope. I got Dunk's Fanewscard about a month and a half ago and saw the pic. Fainted then. Well enough to read the mag now.

Eight stories! And I count twelve coming. Not that I don't want them, but I wish they were longer. Shorts are not so good. Well, you had a good lineup, but rather than rate these stories I will give you the annual report. To wit:

The covers were Bergey, three out of four—Belarski responsible for the fourth. They were all poor, but the Summer Issue had the worst. See CYGNI No. 2 for a good cover (my fmg).

Inside artwork had far too much Marchioni, one Schomberg and a lot of Donnell. She's OKay, being the best artist you seem to be able to get. I made a futile search for the best illustration and gave it up. Mediocre stuff.

The best yarn was THE ETERNAL NOW with FOG OVER VENUS a close second. The next best was LAST MAN IN NEW YORK by Paul McNamara Dunno why I liked it, but I did. Fourth place goes to Wilm Carver and his YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE. Fifth place is a tie between PI IN THE SKY and TERROR IN THE DUST which I thought was cleverly done.

Well, there you are. It was a fair year. Beginning with the Spring Issue, which had nothing to speak of, up to the Winter Issue, which is nearly an epic and makes TWS headed places.

Ummm. THE READER SPEAKS. Ummm. Good letter by Kennedy. Yes, I acknowledge, chief letterhack, that's him. Chad Oliver, chief letterhack. Waible, chief letterhack. Perry, chief diplomat. Then we give thanks to friend Krueger for his blurb about CYGNI. He edits JET, you know.

To Hamel—yeah, I know. Sometime you see something and you feel it happened once before long ago I don't know what it could be unless (according to Polton Cross) it is a memory from the last turn of the Time Circle. Unlikely. Very.

Special mention to DE PROFUNDIS. Fellow Octopi disguised as fans will get homesick because of that yarn.—*68 Madbury Road, Durham, New Hampshire*

Thanks for the kind words in behalf of the Winter ish, Kiwi Perry—are you sure you're felling okay? Ye Sarge is worried at such milk and honey emerging from the twin typewriter

(Turn to page 106)

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fingers of one of his regular fans. Seriously, with THEY SCULP, YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE and DE PROFUNDIS, it seemed to this old astrogator that TWS was particularly strong in the short story department. So why pick on us now, butch, why do it, huh?

As to the reiteration of the chronic beef on Earle J. Bergey in favor of some dreary mechanical drawing, someday the Sarge is going to get really sore and descend on Durham and points west to wipe out such focal points of intransigeance with the Xeno treatment. Which reminds me, Frogeyes, you old Arcturean anthrax, so get busy. . . .

CRITICS AT BAY BAYS

By Sherman Brown, 3rd (the Deadly Denverite)

Dear Sarge: This morning I looked out my window. There a great mob was gathered. Ye Gods, thought I, a lynching! But no—'twas only STF fans from all over the world, baying for my blood. It seems I had outraged the poor little dears by criticizing their idol, Leigh Brackett.

After the third coat of tar and feathers I managed to grasp the mob's temper and agreed that Leigh Brackett was a wonderful writer. Anyway, after her last story, I had already changed my views on her. But I still think Cummings (outside of the TUBBY stories), the Binders and the newcomer Tom Pace could outwrite her with one pencil tied behind their backs.

Break out your bullet-proof vest, Sarge. Am coming to New York this summer for a visit. My first act will be to ferret out the broken-down hack writers, perplexed editors and semi-fans who live in the fair metropolis of New York and exterminate them. For all these contribute to the ruination of my true literary love, STF. So, Sarge, when you see my tall Godlike figure mounted on Rusty, my palomino, ride triumphantly into New York brandishing silver-mounted .44's, you'd better duck.

On my list for execution are the editors of TWS & SS, Richard Rosen, Austin Hamel and several others. Have not completed the roster yet. Also several Westerners and Mid-westerners are listed, but due to the ammunition shortage must stick to New York as the headquarters for some time. Chad Oliver, Milt Lesser and Guy Trucano are still safe. Haven't decided what to do with Joe Kennedy yet. Got any suggestions?

Seriously now, the Winter TWS was fairly good. One author, A. K. Barnes, wins Brown's Science Fiction Honor Medal. For good stories and letters, five get Brown's Science Fiction D.S.C. They are Guy Trucano, BSFDSC with palm for a well-thought-out letter, and BSFDSC's to Chad Oliver and Joe Kennedy for good missives. The authors collecting these valuable awards were Wilm Carver and Murray Leinster for good short stories.

Only two of Brown's Science Fiction Distinguished Service Medals will be awarded this time. They go to Emile E. Greenleaf for an interesting letter and to Sergeant Saturn for a good letter column, even if the old reprobate did leave my last letter out (that shows how big-hearted I am, Sarge). On the demerit side, an Undistinguished Disserve Cross goes to R. Rosen for a mudslinging letter, and a Dishonor Medal goes to Fredric Brown for a perfectly rotten story.

BLARE OF BUGLES, ROLL OF DRUMS. I will now list the Winter Ish stories with appropriate comments.

FOG OVER VENUS—very good—95% & 95 merits left.

YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE—good—90% & 45 merits left.

DE PROFUNDIS—good—90% & 45 merits left.

All the others were simply awful, so let's let it go at that.

For the benefit of the ignorant, I am now going to explain my rating system. A novel starts off with 100 merits, a novelet with 75 and a short with 50. Then, for each bad point in a story, I take off one merit. In the end, to compare shorts, novelets and novels, I use the percentage basis. Good huh?—575 *Race Street, Denver, Colorado.*

But not as good as ye Sarge's Xenometer ratings. Tell me just one thing, Sherm, old terror,

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in regard of that visit to New York next summer. Do you think this trip is really necessary. . . .

YIPE, WHAT A GRIPE!

By Emile E. Greenleaf

Dear Sarge: You haven't started off the New Year so well. By that I mean that TWS has slipped—a good deal too. To show you what I mean, I'll dissect the Winter Ish.

Cover—nauseating, definitely. Bergey should have tried it when he was sober. When I went to pay for the mag, the cashier took one look at the cover and gave me fifteen cents to take it away, then proceeded to set fire to the newsstand. I helped. But the *thing* turned out to be of some use—we haven't had to use roach powder for the last three days.

Inside pix—Donnell drew a few sizzlers for FOG OVER VENUS. The best illustration, however, was the one for Carver's story. Either give Marchioni art lessons or shoot him. His horrors are worse than ever.

And now the stories—first FOG OVER VENUS. The same old pioneer-on-a-lien-planet types. Second, DE PROFUNDIS—unusual and interesting, but not strictly STF. Third, YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE—also somewhat out of the ordinary. As for the rest—well, if the pages that held the other stories had been left blank, the mag would have been a lot better.

Now for the reader's letters. Kennedy, my boy, you've pulled a boner! Richard Tooker did *not* write THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY. It was Gilbert K. Chesterton. Tooker wrote THE DAY OF THE BROWN HORDE, if that's what you meant to say.

Mr. Frank, I'm sorry I couldn't attend the Time Traveler's Convention. Too busy. I hear that the next one will be held on June 18, 26581 A. D., in the capital city of the eighth planet of Mizor. I'm going with Leonardo da Vinci and Jules Verne.

Honorable Sarge no likee when this exalted one call said Sarge lowly Xeno-sponge. Oh well, there's an old saying, "The truth hurts."—*1303 Mystery Street, New Orleans 19, Louisiana.*

Not as much as the recent Xeno-shortage, my dear Emile. And what about taking a few home truths yourself, my cocky Ganymedean. In the first place, Donnell did not illustrate FOG OVER VENUS—it was Wilbur Thomas, a crack New York advertising artist. Stuff that in your rocket jets and let fly! In the second place, Wart-ears, ye Sargge is developing his thirst again, yet and constantly. So bring on more Xeno.

These anti-Bergeyites make the old space dog yearn for lustier men of yore who trod the earth their full span of years without wasting a glance on machinery when a purty lass hove into view over the rim of the horizon. As for anti-BEM-ites, methinks they lack imagination.

BERGEY, BELARSKY AND BACKWARD

By A. F. Yeager, Jr.

Hiya, Sarge: You didn't publish my last letter. Tsk! Tsk! You should be ashamed of yourself.

Anyway, I'm back. I am now gonna give you the full good (?) word on the whole of last year's TWS's.

The only humorous humor was PI IN THE SKY.

The only spectacularly *awful* stories were Ford Smith's surprise (ha!) ending bug stories.

I don't like Hack-ett. Or Cummings.

Good novelets were THE ETERNAL NOW and THE LAST MAN IN NEW YORK.

The only good amateur contest story was STOP, THIEF!

The only good shorts were YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE, GOD OF LIGHT and TERROR IN THE DUST.

The covers were, needless to say, terrible. Bergey and Belarski, Belarski and Bergey. Bah!

THE READER SPEAKS was, of course, the best part of any of the mags. Kennedy naturally cops all the honors. Why not print some more poison pen letters that we can squawk about? Things are beginning to get dull. They all would have been better if you had printed some of my epistles.

[*Turn page*]

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Trimmed edges would be nice.

And remember—THRILLING WONDER STORIES spelled backwards is SEIROTS REDNOW GNILLIRHT!!! No *other* magazine can make that statement!!!—*48 Mill Road, Durham, New Hampshire.*

GNILLIRHTS to you, Kiwi Yeager! If things aren't perking up around here with the Sarge picking on H. P. Lovecraft's ghost and Pee-lot's Kennedy and Perry in rare form, why it must be because we are printing your letter at last, at last. Consider your own edges trimmed as of now!

ROSEN IS NO COUSIN

By Richard Rosen

Dear Sarge: When you get artists that will make an STF mag look like an STF mag, I will cease the objections. This strip-tease art would make the POLICE GAZETTE hide its head in shame. Notice the custom-made parachute straps that the Winter Issue's heroine is wearing. Also notice the female on page 13 (as if you could possibly miss her) who, in the story, is described as "solidly built." Talk about illiterate artists.

FOG OVER VENUS was a honey. This is the kind of writing I would like to see in all your issues. It runs away with the principal honors. You would, naturally, spoil the effect with those pics. Nicely done, but the wrong subject as usual.

For some reason or other, I liked PI IN THE SKY.

YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE takes second place. It stirred up a nest of uncertainties. It was a fascinating story. An orchid to Mr. Carver.

Who did that beautiful hunk of artwork for DE PROFUNDIS? You let a person like Marchioni sign his junk, but the best illustration in the whole magazine is anonymous.

Why the sub-head under SCIENTIFACTS?

I like the letters in your department, but your inane comments are something else. "Quick, Frog-eyes, the Xeno." "Bring on another jug, Snaggle-tooth." Et cetera. How about some adult criticism, private?

About finished with this issue's griping. So long.—*215 West 90th Street, New York 24, N. Y.*

Ho, by the seven satellites of Jupiter, does this upstart intend to demote ye Sargge? *Incroyable!* Just for that, *bring* on another jug, Snaggle-tooth, *and* quick, Frog-eyes, the Xeno. You too, Wart-ears, lug up another ladle while the old space dog braces himself to meet this outrageous attack.

As to sub-Kiwi Rosen's other queries, the artist who drew the illustrations for Leinster's DE PROFUNDIS was veteran illustrator Paul Orban. He probably left his name off it in the vague hope of avoiding the slings, arrows and fen-ray guns continually fired at those of his colleagues who have left themselves open targets for abuse hounds.

What about the sub-head under SCIENTIFACTS, pee-lot? What's wrong with it? And as for adult criticism from ye Sarge, you kiwis get just about what you deserve.

ANOTHER XENOTAIER!

By Edwin Sigler

Dear Sarge: To me, all this talk about Xeno jugs and similar methods of rating stories are rather silly. They give people the impression that readers of science-fiction are mentally unbalanced. I want to know why a reader does or does not like a story, not how he rates it on an arbitrary scale.

I figure the only way to improve the department is to see if I can start an argument, so here goes—

I believe the following theories are hooey—

The Lorentz-Fitzgerald Contraction theorem
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Hyperspace
Limiting velocity of light
Ultra-space warps

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Variable Nature of time
Cosmic rays causing mutations.

The above are only theories and cannot be proved except by actual physical experience, so until then I am going to keep on ridiculing them.

There was another story I found something wrong with—the lead novel. In fact there was plenty wrong with all the stories. Let's have some based on real science, not on theories that cannot stand up under a test.—*616 North Topeka, Wichita, Kansas.*

It is apparent, sub-sub-Kiwi Sigler, that your understanding of the very nature of science fiction is among the minus quantities. Science fiction is, by its very nature and name, *fiction*. Its definition in the dictionary, Funk & Wagnall's Desk Standard in this case, is, "One. A feigning or representation of that which is not true; a fabrication. Two. The department of literature that embraces fictitious narrative; also, a story based on imagination; a novel."

If you want facts, sub-sub-kiwi, don't look for them in STF. From the days of Jules Verne and Bulwer-Lytton, science-fiction has looked consistently far ahead of dry-as-dust scientists into the truths of the future and, as often as not, revealed it for those intelligent enough to accept more than mere facts.

If you still want facts, you can get all you want or need in any public library or science laboratory or schoolroom!

BERGEY IS A BEM

By Frank Clark

Dear Souse-Sarge: I pen this letter on nice, white school paper with lines on it in order to go easy on your red-rimmed, bloodshot eyes. Let's see, why did I write this anyway? Boy Clark, you've got some memory.

Shut up, bub. That's my alter-ego, whatever that is.

Item—Winter THRILLING WONDER STORIES.

(Roll of drums, fanfare!)

Yes, man, you have a very neat issue out this time—all except the cover. Why can't you editors get it through your thick (yes, thick!) heads that nobody likes your covers. It's not Bergey. He draws okay. It's the idea—always a guy, a gal and a goon! Nobody likes it, so why don't you change?

A nice spaceship scene, or machinery or something would be swell, but anything except what you put on there now would be an improvement. Why don't you do something about it?

And now the stories. This may surprise you. I wonder if anyone will agree with me. On strict orders from the warden to humor you, I'll rate them by your system.

No. 1—DE PROFUNDIS by Murray Leinster—8½ jugs. A real good story. It's an old plot—alien life form sees humans and almost knocks itself out over them—but anyway I liked it a lot.

No. 2—CASTAWAYS IN TWO DIMENSIONS—7½ jugs. Mainly because I liked Knobby. A good one.

No. 3—Tied between YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE and FOG OVER VENUS. They rate 6 jugs apiece.

No. 4 and on down—PI IN THE SKY, I GET OFF HERE, STOP THIEF! and THEY SCULP. Not so hot. An average of about 5 jugs, except for THEY SCULP which rates only about 3.

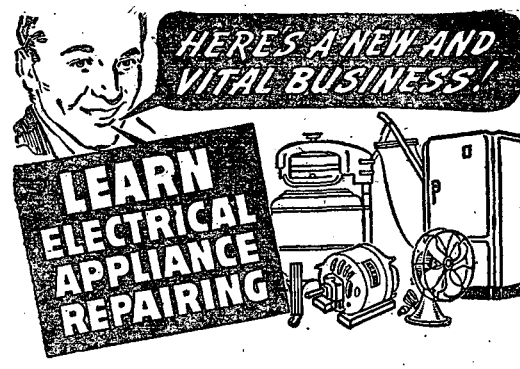
The pictures this time weren't so hot. The best was the one for DE PROFUNDIS on page 92. Who drew it? The one on page 85 for YOU'LL SEE A PINK HOUSE was second best. Who drew that one? Gee, why don't they sign their names? The only artists whose work I recognize always sign theirs. The one I don't know never. It's a cruel, cruel world.

So much for this issue. The next one looks plenty good. Jerry Shelton, Ross Rocklynne and Polton Cross! Boy, that's a pretty neat lineup. How about going monthly right now so I don't have to wait three months. That's all, except change the theme of your covers before we get really violent.

If you don't print this, I'll write again, I'm warning you. If you do print it, I'll probably write again anyway.—*4 Arlington Avenue, Baldwin, New York.*

Thanks for the Xeno rating, Astrogator Clark, but you really should have sent the jugs. They

[*Turn page*]



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might have kept us in less crusty mood throughout, thus enabling us to avoid a lot of feuds. But feud and drink make the old Sarge go.

Your two artists were Paul Orban and Wilbur Thomas respectively. And that about winds up the letters from readers for the Spring Issue. Keep them coming. Some of the Sarge's regular pests are among the missing this time around the rim of the universe. Let's hope they're on deck in plenty of time for the next READER SPEAKS.

THE SCIENCE-FICTION LEAGUE

PLENTY of activity this trip. Merchant Mariner John A. La Bane of the S.S. Tumacaconi, otherwise of 1509 Mullan Avenue, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, is among our newest members, as is Signal Corps Private Albert T. Lopez of 29 Maverick Square, East Boston, Massachusetts.

Austin Hamel of 2090 East Tremont Avenue, New York 62, New York, has filed a note to inform ye Sarge that he is selling his collection of back numbers of TWS, SS and CF.

And Walter Dunkelberger, the old Minn-Dak secretary in person, hasn't let a siege of flu stop his activities. He wishes to state that son Jimmy is just three years old instead of five as listed in a recent issue erroneously—and wants to add Jon Lloyd Dunkelberger to the SFL membership list as its youngest (born November 15 last) member, also requests membership for Jacqueline Marie Dunkelberger and Jeraldine Dunkelberger, making the family-SFL solidarity complete. Get well quick, Dunk.

Ken Krueger dropped us a line anent the new Buffalo fan clubhouse and wants a few originals for the walls. They'll be along pronto, Ken, old Kiwi. And Earl Kay will get his.

Well's it's swell to have the fans stirring—and keep on stirring, you baiters of ye Sarge. He can and will take it when it's all in fun. Sign up for the Science Fiction League and get your cards. If you can get a group of seven, you rate a charter.

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So long, everybody!

—SERGEANT SATURN.

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THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

WE AGAIN have two barrels to THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY, with explanatory letters from soldier-musician Jerry Shelton and scientifictioneer Ross Rocklynne. Shelton, who is now overseas in the thick of the fighting in France,

has the following to say in sounding off about his amazing and amusing DEVILS OF DARKONIA:

The rain has either gone to sleep for awhile, or else it has gone back for a refill, and hope it decides to rain on the Germans for a change. So I have wriggled out of my palatial pup-tent (furnished with one fox hole—a deep one) to find a dry place to scribble off a STORY BEHIND THE STORY for DEVILS FROM DARKONIA.

The idea for DEVILS FROM DARKONIA started out in Hollywood while I was working in a picture for Universal Studios. We had been shooting all morning, and about noon the yell for lunch went up. The studio commissary was crowded, and the waitress who took my order served it to me without benefit of plate.

At any rate, the plate was on top and the food beneath. And my suit supported the entire mess. Someone had nudged her elbow at the right moment for the wrong thing. The suit was a mess, and it would be impossible for me to finish the day's scene unless the wardrobe department had a duplicate.

Wardrobe had it, and as I slipped into the clean suit of clothes, the idea bounced off my skull as to how convenient it would be to have *two* bodies. When one body was tired or sick or whatnot—just put on the other clean one. And I wished I knew of a place where I could get another body, as I was feeling rather beat at the moment.

The notion and desire refused to leave me, and it was mostly to blow off steam that I dreamed up Professor Hux Bradley and his problem. Also, it gave me a chance to blow off more steam about how a musician *really* thinks and talks his own musical jargon. That talk in the night club is authentic stuff.

Today looks like a good day to dry out my blankets on some of these French apple trees. Guess I'd better get going. So long for awhile.

—*Jerry Shelton.*

AND now veteran, able scientifictioneer Ross Rocklynne opens up with a word barrage on how he happened to conceive of such a super-waterspout as is created in his fine story of adventure on the second planet from the Sun. Vulcanophiles will please withhold their objections.

Says Mr. Rocklynne:

[*Turn page*]

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Well, since I'm writing a little piece about VENUS SKY TRAP for the back of the book, I think I'll tell the truth about it—not that I don't always tell the truth except in stories. The truth is, I don't think this story could happen. Not the basic premise of a water-spout, which is caused by osmotic pressure.

Any real scientist or any regular science-fiction fan could arrive at that conclusion with just a minimum of thought.

And while we're at it, let's all let our hair down and admit that a good percentage of science-fiction stories aren't built on a good basic premise.

What I mean by good basic premise is a premise which rests on sound science. I also mean, that sometimes it doesn't matter a lot whether your premise is scientific or not—accurately scientific. The main thing is first to fool yourself into thinking you're being scientific. Then you'll easily fool the editor and the reader—enough so that he'll accept what follows.

That's the beautiful part of scientifiction. You can dream up some fanciful events, then hunt around for your explanation. Make it a good explanation, try to make it logical enough so that it won't appear too absurd. For instance, I had a lot of fancy, yet sound scientific events which could occur if only I had a water-spout two miles high.

Manifestly, a two-mile waterspout was impossible. But I couldn't abandon an idea because I didn't have a good idea to support it. The thing to do was to manufacture something that was pseudo-plausible, and hope the readers would understand. Which I did. So I got my water-spout, and the readers get a story—good, bad, mediocre, but a story nonetheless.

I said something awhile ago about fooling myself. I'll tell you about that. You know, VENUS SKY TRAP is one of my "problem" stories. Problem stories, as I write them, are not so much scientific as they are *giant*-ific. I take toy ideas. Then I blow them up to giant size.

I take a crowbar and make it 92,000,000,000 miles—92 billion, understand—long, and write a story about it. But all the while I'm writing that story I'm not thinking of a crowbar 92,000,000,000 miles long, I'm thinking of a crowbar six feet long.

I can't comprehend a billion miles. If I thought about that crowbar in terms of billions of miles, I wouldn't get any conviction into the story, which was, incidentally, one I wrote many years ago, ANTON MOVES THE EARTH—you may remember it.

Frankly, I didn't believe a lever that long could be fabricated, no matter who the super-scientific genius was. So in my mind's eye I just wrote about a toy model of that giant lever.

Same with other stories. A pendulum 600 miles long, with a swing of a thousand miles every seventeen minutes. A siphon, five miles high. A mountain, as big as a planet. A giant bubble. A giant screw, a giant whip—but these last two are in process of creation. And of course the giant water-spout.

You want to know where the idea for the story came from? From a water fountain, the kind that spouts up a jet of water. A sphere of paraffin will ride on top that jet. So if you have trouble absorbing the idea of a two-mile jet, take it in toy-size, seven or eight inches, as I did when I put the yarn down on paper.

Hope you enjoy VENUS SKY TRAP.

—*Ross Rocklynne.*

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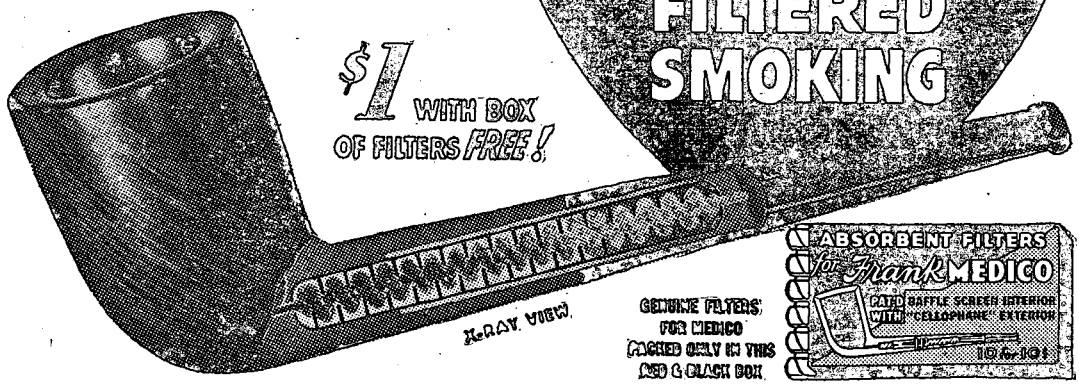
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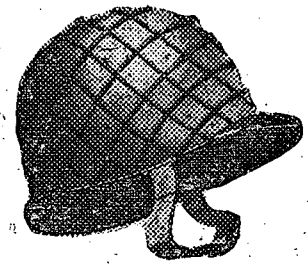

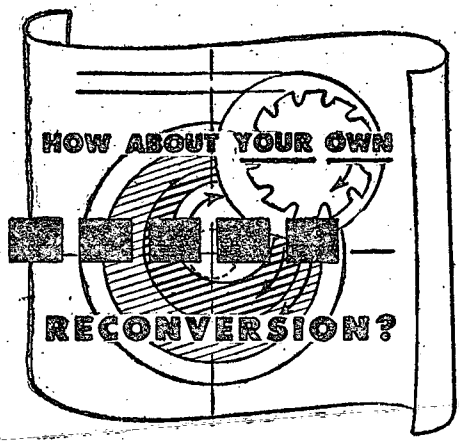

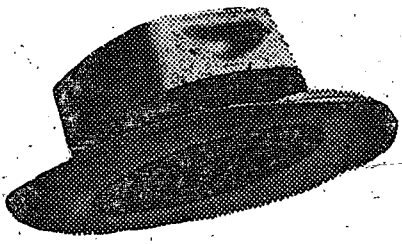

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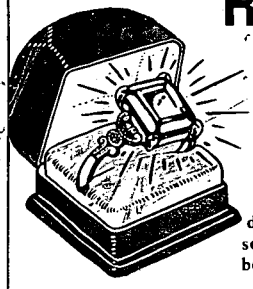
BIRTHSTONE RING



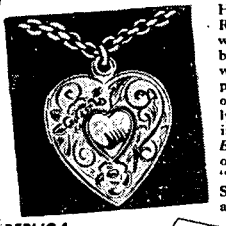
Smart, new, dainty Sterling Silver ring set with sparkling birthstone correct for your month date. *Given* for selling only 5 boxes.

GIVEN

Your Choice of Valuable GIFTS or CASH

Send No Money Now. Do like thousands of others do and get cash or valuable gifts such as billfolds, scissors, games, bracelets, rings, lockets, jewelry, hosiery and other premiums that are easily yours. Simply send the coupon and tell us what gift you would like to earn. The gift you select is given to you promptly and sent postpaid for selling just a few boxes of nationally known *"Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner"* at 25c each and returning the money collected as explained in our free catalog sent with your first order. Here's your lucky chance to receive a valuable gift. Your friends, relatives and neighbors all need "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner" that saves many, many dollars in dry cleaning bills. Repeat orders bring cash or more gifts.

CHARMING LOCKET



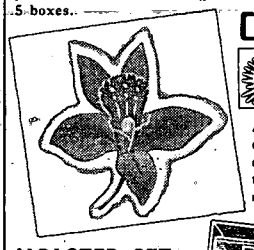
Choice of Dainty Heart Locket or Round Hollywood Remembrance Locket with space for pictures of loved ones. Beautifully embossed 18-inch chain. *GIVEN* for selling only 10 boxes of "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner."

Hollywood Photo Folder

4 x 6 inch, Genuine leather folder has celluloid protected fronts for 2 pictures. Comes with 2 Movie Star pictures. *Given* for selling 5 boxes.

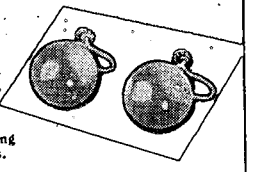
ORCHID

GLOWS IN DARK



Alluring Orchid in size and delicate coloring by day and at night a shimmering butterfly jewel that glows with mysterious beauty. *Given* for selling 10 boxes.

REPLICA PEARL EARRINGS



Button type Iridescent Replica PEARL EARRINGS half inch size. GIVEN for selling 10 boxes.

DOLL

7 inches high. Lifelike hair and coloring. Dressed in colored print and felt bonnet. GIVEN for selling only 10 boxes and remitting as explained in free catalog.

MEN'S NECKTIE

Attractive designs in lively colors. GIVEN for selling only 5 boxes.

HOLSTER SET

Cowboy Outfit. Regular Texas type Pistol and decorated holster with leather belt. *Given* for selling only 10 boxes.

Friendship RING

"2-in-1" Sterling Silver "True Love-and-Friendship" Ring. Hands actually clasp and unclasp. *Given* for selling 10 boxes.

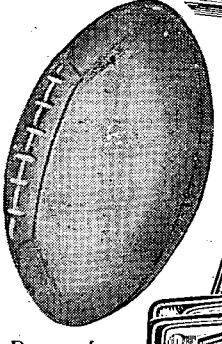
Ring opens and closes as shown.

SHEER RAYON HOSIERY

Mock seam fashion. Ring free. Every pair gives excellent wear, and is sent in the size you specify. *Given* for selling only 5 boxes of "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner" and returning the money collected.

Send today as premium supplies are limited.

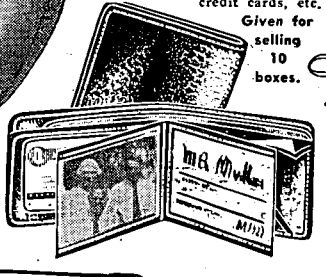
FOOTBALL



Official size, very tough and sturdy FOOTBALL. GIVEN for selling 10 boxes as specified in gift catalog.

LEATHER BILLFOLD

This LEATHER BILLFOLD provides space for currency and protected pockets for membership cards, credit cards, etc. *Given* for selling 10 boxes.



Dozens of useful gifts and cash offered in our free catalog.

Mail This Gift Coupon To-day

Dresser Set

This DRESSER SET consisting of COMB, BRUSH and MIRROR in beautiful gift box given for selling 10 boxes of "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner" as explained in our catalog.

POWERFUL TELESCOPE

Everyone enjoys this Powerful Telescope for spotting planes, hunting and vacations. *Given* for selling only 10 boxes of "Gold Crown Spot Remover and Cleaner." Just send the coupon for your order to start.

Enclose this coupon in an envelope or paste it on a postcard and send it to **GOLD CROWN PRODUCTS, Dept. E-361, Jefferson, Iowa,** for order to start.

GIFT Wanted

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

GOLD CROWN PRODUCTS Dept. E-361, Jefferson, Iowa

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